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**Individual Parental Coaching (IPC) - An optional way to  
improve communication between parents and  
adolescents in conventionally structured families in  
Israel**

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Submitted by Iris Barkan

December 2018

## **Acknowledgments**

First and foremost, I would like to thank the parents that participated in my research, for opening their homes and hearts to me, for being prepared to enter an emotional journey, for their readiness to boldly look into themselves and into their lives and for their willingness to let me be a part of their exploration process.

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## **Abstract:**

This research explores the connection and influence that individual parental coaching (IPC) has on the teenager-parent relationship. Essentially, the research had two main goals, firstly to examine the possible influence of a parental coaching process, with respect to the parents' ability to form better connections and communication with their adolescent children. Furthermore, it sought out to validate a certain perception of parenting - the notion that a parent must first establish a firm sense of "self" before taking part in parenting. As described by Ayn Rand (1943): "for one to say 'I love you', one must first say the 'I', thus self-definition, purpose and meaning are the individual's significant guidelines when establishing relations with others, especially the demanding relations with teenagers. The initial assumption of the research was that individual parental coaching, would give parents an opportunity to undergo an extensive personal coaching process that would help strengthen the parents' core values, boundaries and priorities. This would then enable them to address their parental role with confidence, conviction and flexibility, rather than confusion, fear of losing significance and control, and consequently effecting the teenager-parent equation for the better.

This was a qualitative narrative research, since the parents' life stories, as perceived and related by them, were at the base of this research. Seven Israeli families participated; heterosexual married couples that had raised at least one teenager between the ages of 13 to 18. On the one hand, the parents took part in a comprehensive coaching process consisting of ten weekly sessions; on the other hand, the teenagers filled out questionnaires, and thus were a part of the research in an indirect manner. All the data that was collected from questionnaires, coaching sessions and open interviews were analyzed using the "Theme Analysis" method, which revealed some prominent individual and parental issues that contemporary Israeli parents deal with.

Results indicate two central findings - a great appreciation on the parents' part for the opportunity to enter into a deep process of self-encounter and its

benefits, despite all the difficulties along the way. The second one addressed the research question itself and showed an explicit change process in the communication and connection between parents and teenagers on varying levels, from both the parents' as well as the teenagers' points of view. Improvements included more time spent together, less anger and friction, more patience and tolerance, awareness to discourse style and word choices and an overall better atmosphere around the house.

All participating parents without exception stated that it was a worthy journey, which they would recommend all parents experienced.

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## Chapter 1 - Introducing the field and the research

### Preface

There have been increasing calls for parenting classes and guidance workshops to help deal with the issues that contemporary families face. The field of parental coaching is a growing one, with programs based on behavioral approaches being among the most common. The parental coaching aim as described by Ellam & Palmer (2006:35) is: *"It is designed to empower parents with the confidence and ability to find the answers themselves"*. However, as Bornstein (2012:7) points out, different cultures produce different values, communication styles and therefore parenting patterns: *"...neither parenting nor children's development occurs in a vacuum: Both emerge and grow in a medium of culture..."*. Both quotations touched upon the motivation for conducting this research – to check the effectiveness of the individual parental coaching process within a cultural context.

The literature is not particularly well developed for looking at various societies facing conflicting sets of values. In Israel, in spite of its Middle Eastern location identifies itself as part of Western democratic society, where tradition lives alongside multiple cultures that are based in religious belief, a situation that gives rise to conflicting ideas on parenting.

We need more studies looking at the development of patterns of interaction and communication in the family during adolescence, as well as a parental coaching literature, which is more informed by the research on adolescent development in different cultures. This study is designed to explore both of these areas of the literature and as such, contribute to our understanding of developing family interactions in adolescence years and to the expanding parental coaching literature.

This research set out to examine a structured coaching program and the influence that it might have on the changing patterns of interaction and communication emerging from the parent/adolescent units in the program. This is a qualitative exploration of the patterns that evolve from implementing an

individual parental coaching method. It is an in-depth qualitative study of patterns that are common in contemporary Israeli families.

### **A. General Overview**

There are countless theories, recommendations and models, written and built over the generations, which attempt to describe, explain and deal with the complex processes that take place during adolescence. There is an overwhelming consensus among researchers that it is a critical period of personal and human development, during which the adolescent undergoes two major processes - separation and individuation (Blos 1979) (Erikson 1967; 1994) (Inhelder & Piaget 1958) (Arnett 1999) (Allen et al. 2016). It can best be described as a separation from the protected and all-encompassing parental world experienced during early childhood, and an accelerated foray into the world of their peers. Adolescents also experience a new desire to settle themselves in that world, while struggling to find an individual unique voice that characterizes them as separate, both from their family and their reference group. This occurs simultaneously at a time when adolescents find themselves confused and in a 'fast moving storm' of physical, emotional and cognitive changes that are unknown and unclear to them and are not even in sync with one another (Palkoff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Blos, 1979). Marcia (1983:216) summarizes it well in his statement that *"early adolescence is a period of disorganization"*, as also described by Montemayor (1983:85):

*"Adolescents are thought to lack mature skills to cope with these changes, and therefore, experience a high degree of what has been referred to as "transitional stress."*

For many adolescents, parents had been, until that point, stable, secure, anchoring and trusting authority figures. Suddenly, every parental statement is 'questioned', and the parents find themselves undermined and losing status. In many cases, though definitely not in all the parent-child connection, which was once generally pleasant, relaxed and free flowing, is transformed into one saturated with conflict, objection, anger, frustration, disappointment and mutual insults. Interpersonal communication, one of the most important and

central tools in human relations, becomes fraught with mishaps and misunderstandings as described by Montemayor (1983:85):

*"The idea that parent-adolescent relations are stressful is wildly accepted not only by adolescence theorists and many practicing clinicians, but also by many parents of adolescents and the adolescents themselves."*

Another perspective to these frictions is the different way in which teenagers experience them as opposed to how their parents do. As described by parents, they feel that these conflicts indicate a rejection of the basic values that they have been using to raise their children by, while teenagers treat them as much less important.

*"This is why it is the parents, and not the adolescents, who walk away upset and who stay upset".* (Steinberg 2001:7)

An additional factor that highlights the gap between parent and adolescent is the entry of the latter into their peer group. It is the unbearable ease (in the eyes of parents) with which they immediately develop deep relationships with peers that they barely know. This is particularly difficult since they are simultaneously engaged in a challenging dialogue with parents who have long proven themselves as trustworthy and supportive. Most parents encourage children to form social connections and friendships inside their age group, realizing the great importance of such relations on children' and adolescents' social development. As stated by Ladd (2005:11) *"peers make a significant and enduring contribution to children's socialization and development"*. Nevertheless, or maybe because of those instant and spontaneous relations with friends outside, parents often feel used, irrelevant and practically transparent, finding that they are no longer a significant part of their child's new world.

Parenthood is mostly perceived as a natural privilege, as innate, traditional, and instinctive, unburdened by planning or thought. However, parenting adolescents can be suddenly filled with anger, guilt, a feeling of failure, loss of direction, and can become a chore that burdens the family dynamics. In some cases it takes a great toll on the relationship of the parents as a couple, as described in Silverberg & Steinberg (1987:303):

*"These mildly upsetting interchanges over day-to-day issues are not relationship breakers. Their repetitive nature, however, takes a toll on parental mental health, especially among mothers, who bear the brunt of the "front-line action" in most households."*

### **A.1 How it all happened – A brief historical glance**

The twentieth century is considered to be the - "century of the child." Ellen Keys, the Swedish theoretician and reformer, introduced the term for the first time in her book carrying the same name, which was published in 1900 (translated to English in 1909). In her writing, she anticipated the vast changes in social, political, psychological and educational arenas, that are about to take place due to the recognition of children's unique needs and wellbeing.<sup>1</sup> Children of Western cultures have greatly benefited by the changes that took place during this period. It was an era of awakening and deepening understanding of the important processes that take place during childhood and adolescence. Society developed a greater appreciation for the different physical and emotional needs of children who were no longer seen as "small adults". Soon a completely new worldview arose around the concept of children's rights. A significant landmark of that era is the declaration of "The child's bill of rights" that was finally approved by the United Nations in November 1989 (Michalson, 2000; Corsaro, 1997).

These major changes caused an upheaval in the traditional family structure, common at that time, as referred to in Gerson & Torres (2015:6):

*"The last three decades of the 20th century witnessed interrelated worldwide trends -- including rapid rises in women's employment, marital separation, cohabitation, delayed marriage, and single parenthood".*

Traditional structured families up until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century were characterized by a clear division of family roles: mother, father and children. The relationships between parents and children were based on respect, distance and

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<sup>1</sup> The quarterly review of comparative education (Paris, UNESCO: International Bureau of Education), vol. XXIII, no. 3/4, 1993, p. 825-837. ©UNESCO: International Bureau of Education, 2000

fear. Children were expected to fulfill parents' requests without question or doubt. A well-known phrase reflects the spirit of the times:

*"children should be seen but not heard".*<sup>2</sup>

Social and psychological changes in the last century caused a shift in focus on the child, placing the child at the center and creating a new class called "a children's class", thus transforming the concept of "child" into that of an autonomous person in his own right. New and varied psychological theories emerged in the field called "the psychology of the child" that explored the physical and emotional growth of the child and characterized different stages of development, each of which was perceived as critically important to the healthy intellectual, social and sexual development of the child. (See part on developmental psychology p. 24).

A "children's culture" was developed, one based on children's diverse consuming needs (such as the need to be clothed and fed), their interests and culture (as reflected for instance in literature, television or film), and their leisurely activities and spiritual enrichment (such as extra-curricular activities or unique education). Questions arose among parents and educators about the best form of education for their children, ranging from the pedagogical, educational and playful perspective, to the nature of relations that might develop in the new family structure. This new mindset seeped into the family structure and the concept of parenthood (Jenkins, 1998; Kline, 1995).

At the halfway point of the last century, strict discipline of children began to disappear and greater freedom was granted. The freedom to make their own decisions and choices, the freedom to express their thoughts and feelings without fear of physical or other punishment, and the freedom to rebel and oppose their parents' path. Children's rights were given specific boundaries and

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/children-should-be-seen-and-not-heard.html/>

the child's new central place in the world blurred the traditional division of roles and status of parents as the sole authority (John, 2003; Elkind, 2009).

These processes occurred parallel to a global move that characterized the twenty-first century, which put forth an almost sacred and significant emphasis on new values such as individualism, freedom to privacy, the right to personal choices, free will and self-fulfillment. The rapid technological development during this century caused such dramatic changes, allowing for greater access to information from television and computers (Bryant, 2006). Both channels are easy to use and attainable to almost everyone, offering children access to new and exciting worlds that had been previously closed to them or moderated through adult eyes and discretion. It goes without saying that exposure to the adult world and its content is fraught with many dangers, but it is also coupled with wonderful possibilities of interest, growth and development (Gentile, 2014).

All of these features largely characterize a secular Western culture, which Israel strives to be considered a part of, and significantly less so traditional and religious societies around the world, where the concept of a traditional family is maintained on different levels. The most blatant of these levels are the clear division of roles between fathers and mothers, which still endures, and strict etiquette that defines the parent-child relationship.

Near the end of the twentieth century, postmodernism increased, introducing fresh challenges of beliefs, values, behaviors, traditions and thoughts that characterized the modern age. Some of the more significant changes in this era included the tendency to abandon truths and/or science, and to challenge or examine virtually any statement. It offered virtually unlimited space for pluralism and freedom of thought. All these changes in the value systems and laws obviously increased parental confusion (Elkind, 2009).

It is reasonable to expect that, particularly when there is a blurring of boundaries between childhood and adulthood, with all that it entails, things can become confusing (Faircloth et al, 2013). The same democratization and modernization



of children's worldviews and the centrality given to them, led parents to attempt to answer their every need and grant them open education, all of which ultimately led to growing confusion in the parent-child relationship and the ensuing difficulty in establishing parental presence, boundaries and authority. In an attempt to dispel this "parental fog", a term coined by the Israeli researcher Dor (2004), different parental coping patterns were and continue to be developed in order to help parents reach out to their adolescent child.

According to Turel (2003), four types of parenting styles can significantly influence the quality of the emotional bonds between adolescents and their parents:

The Authoritative Parenting Style: This type of parenting mainly relies on accepting the adolescent and his world through close monitoring. There is responsiveness to the adolescent's changing needs, accompanied by parental assertiveness. There is an avoidance of unnecessary power struggles yet there are standards and codes of conduct. These relationships have parameters such as warmth, room for autonomy but discipline that comes from a supportive foundation. This parenting style most successfully encourages separation and individualization.

The Authoritarian Parenting Style: In contrast to the Authoritative Style, this parenting style is based on a very tight control of the adolescent and difficulty in accepting their world. There is no responsiveness to the adolescents' changing needs; instead there are orders and demands with an expectation of obedience. Research shows that adolescents raised in such an environment, tend to show symptoms of distress, depression and behavioral problems.

The Permissive Parenting Style: Here there is a high level of responsiveness to the changing needs of the adolescent with little demands and conflict avoidance. Generally, such parenting stems from the parents' difficulty in coping with change. Adolescents who experience this kind of parenting appear to demonstrate confidence yet there is a higher incidence of drug and alcohol abuse among them.

The Rejecting/Neglecting Parenting Style: In families like this, the parental role is abandoned. There are no expectations of the adolescent; no codes of conduct, no supervision and at the same time no responsiveness to his needs. Adolescents raised in such families are most vulnerable and are prone to behavioral problems, alcohol and drug abuse, criminal behavior, low self-esteem and identity problems.

Effective parenting styles are those that can find a balance between the adolescent "self" and the parents' needs (Pecnik et al., 2007; Hoghughi & Long, 2004). Good communication with the adolescents relies on expanding freedom, flexibility and a respectful relating to their world as described in Oryan & Gastil (2013:113):

*"Some prominent parent education theories in the United States and other Western countries base their educational viewpoint explicitly on democratic values, such as mutual respect, equality and personal freedom. These democratic parenting theories advocate sharing power with children and including them in family decision making."*

In light of all the difficulties that characterize adolescent parenting in this new era, parents are searching for a "magic pill", a "guide to the perplexed" that will lead them down a different path than the one their own parents took. They seek to chart a new course for themselves and their lost children, paths that will cross one another where parent and adolescent can meet (Stearns, 2004). Parental coaching is one of the better options, allowing for the re-introduction, self-study and reflection on the parenting process. As presented in the model below, it can be an effective tool for navigating this winding road of raising adolescents (Ellam & Palmer, 2006).

At its core, coaching mainly deals with **change** (Kimsey-House et al, 2010). Coaching addresses the desire, dream, ambition to move from one place to another, regardless of the nature of the dream or how hard it is to achieve, or the opinion of others regarding one's private dream. At the end of the coaching process, we expect to find parents who have successfully experienced changes in emotional, behavioral and thinking processes. All these changes allow them to build a new bridge of communication that works best with their adolescent

children, while gaining a sense of control over a relationship that was previously chaotic. One can then make room for the building of a co-operative family environment for all of its members.

## **A.2 Being a parent in Israel – Cultural background**

Becoming a parent in Israel seems more of a mandatory task than a personal choice. There is a certain path that young Israeli's are expected to follow - finish high school, go through Army service, get an education, find a job, and then marry and start a family.

*"However, a more thorough examination of these processes highlights the fact that despite the far-reaching changes described above, familyism remains the identifying mark of Israeli society" (Rutlinger-Reiner, 2013:8).*

Choosing not to marry or not to have children in Israel is almost impossible and highly unacceptable; choosing a different path takes its toll both on a personal level, as well as on a social one. (The subject of Israeli parenthood is elaborated in the theoretical literature review on p. 34).

Keeping that in mind, it is safe to assume that most young Israeli couples choosing to follow that path, are doing so on an "automatic pilot" - fall in love get married and have children. That is what everybody else around them is doing. It is more a question of when to have children and how many, than whether not to have them at all.

Most young couples give more thought and consideration to mundane decisions such as - where to hold the wedding, where to live, which family car to buy etc., than to the discussion, the reflection or even the consideration of the complexity of being a parent.

The role of parenthood seems natural and intuitive to most, one that could be entered into without further thought. One of the results of such a course is encountering unexpected difficulties when becoming a parent, which are intensified during the child's adolescence.

My interest in the subject arose after many years of working with Israeli parents and their adolescents; as a group facilitator and a coach, I have seen a great deal of confusion, frustration, disappointment and anger between them. After a few years' experience of working as a personal life coach and studying at the Israeli Adlerian Institute which specializes in parent-child relations, I have so far conducted many parent groups designed to aid parents of adolescents in coping with this new challenge. These groups of parents (usually organized within a school context) met in order to share and discuss conflictual issues and to learn better ways to communicate with teenagers. Most groups tended to meet for ten sequential meetings, once a week. In addition, I would meet with parents and teenagers in my private coaching clinic for individual coaching sessions, both separate and together.

During my professional encounters with parents, I have met parents that have had a great deal of difficulty in establishing authentic and happy connections with their teenagers, and trouble in achieving positive, open and honest communication during those turbulent years. I have spoken to parents who seemed to have lost their way, parents who feel guilty for not being able to connect with their teenagers, others who are not familiar with the reasons for the choices they make, but mostly, I have seen parents who feel both unheard and unseen.

I believe there are a few major processes that influence and even enhance these difficulties:

1. Raising children in the 21st century presents great challenges to parents. Children are placed in the center, they have high access to information, are more knowledgeable in technology than their parents are, and there is confusion and mixing between worlds.
2. Even though parents of the new era know more than their own parents did, they are more confused and less confident with regard to parenthood. Some of the parents seem to base their parenthood on a confused and sometimes even chaotic set of values, beliefs and priorities.

3. Being a parent effects most aspects of an individual's life. It consumes time, money and emotional resources. The wish to raise healthy and happy children seems to push aside the position of a parent as a separate individual and compresses their personal experience into one main job, which is to be a parent, hence, supply various children's needs.
4. It appears that parents sometimes fail to see the connection between their own happiness, personal fulfillment and self-awareness, and how all of these, could make them become better people hence better parents.

The book: "*parents as humans*" published in Israel in 1997 (Amit, 1997), which focused on parents rather than children, was quite a novelty at the time. It made a great impression on me and ignited my professional life. Yet, 20 years later, not much has changed in the practical field of parental help in Israel.

In my attempt to broaden my knowledge and professional skills I reviewed the relevant literature regarding parental help programs and their agenda (Mullis, 1999; McVittie & Best, 2009; Sommers-Flanagan, 2007; Moran et al., 2004). I also examined parental help programs such as the Adlerian parent school, parental guidance etc. (as elaborated in the literature review, section F – "parental help and guidance" p. 49).

In the Israeli context, some well-known and accepted programs are : "Adler parent's school", Prof. A. Rolider<sup>3</sup>, and the Israeli "super-nannie". Along the years, I have been working in several parents' help programs. The "Azrieli project"<sup>4</sup>, the "Yedidim organization"<sup>5</sup> and Wtb<sup>6</sup>, hence I was able to compare them and recognize the advantages and disadvantages of each one. However, my strongest impression was with regard to the fact that most of them still focus on the child's needs and wellbeing, while parents are referred to merely 'as a tool to better their children's lives'. Moreover, some of them aimed to "fix"

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.rolidera.co.il/English>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.azrielifoundation.org/programs/education/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://yedidim-israel.org/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.wtb.org.il/english/>

parents so they would suit today's adolescents' world, needs, wishes and expectations. Parents were considered secondary in importance, mainly in relation to their children, therefore take on the ***transparent status*** a phrase coined by R. Cohen (Cohen, 2010).

#### **B. Purpose of the Study:**

I started this research seeking to find a way in which parents would become '**un-transparent**', and would receive an opportunity to be treated as equally important as their children. I thought to create a way where by undergoing a personal journey, during which they would be able to crystallize a meaningful and viable set of values, beliefs and boundaries, they would be able to improve communication and connection with their teenagers.

I believed that by taking a moment for themselves as whole individuals, where they explored their core and inner selves, parents would achieve an improved sense of self, improved relationships with their teenagers and an overall improvement of the family atmosphere.

#### **The purpose of this study was two-fold:**

1. To explore the possible impact that an individual parental coaching process might have on the parents' communication with their teenage children. On the one hand, the goal was to enable them to explore, understand and define for themselves their parental vision and set of values. On the other hand, I sought to find out if such a process would lead to a stable and open bridge of communication between the participant parents and their teenagers.
2. To contribute to the knowledge base and literature regarding contemporary Israeli parenthood, including specific issues it deals with, current dilemmas and conflicts they encounter. This contribution consisted also of the presentation of the IPC – individual parental coaching, a coaching work method, which aims to work with and focus on the parents.

### **C. Research Question:**

What are patterns of change (if any) in the relationships between parents and their adolescent children, including the quality of their connection, lines of communication and improvement of the family atmosphere, that will be seen after parents undergo an individual coaching process.

### **D. The research Rationale:**

As poetically stated in Rosemarie Anderson's words:

*"Throughout the human sciences and humanities, it is generally acknowledged that the major aim of research and academic pursuits is to expand the knowledge base of one's discipline—i.e., to provide further information about a topic of scientific or scholarly interests. What is not as frequently recognized is that, in addition to information, research can provide opportunities for transformation as well." (Anderson & Braud, 2011:15)*

Parental coaching is a growth experience that empowers parents and gives them an opportunity to set out on a journey of familiarity with their "self," their values as individuals, exploring secret dreams and unspoken fears, an opportunity for transformation. This is addressed at first on an individual level, and later all of these components are examined in connection with the parental role and context.

Parents take on the significant role of parenthood without a guide or manual, training or coaching, apart from the parental modeling they experienced in their own childhood home. Nevertheless, the responsibility for raising happy and well-adjusted children through complete adulthood is solely that of the parents. To accomplish this complex task, it is necessary to take the time to examine oneself. There is no end to the doubts and questions regarding the parenting role, which should be asked aloud, discussed and addressed, since parents are the ones to carry the most responsible role and are agents of change in their children's lives.

The uniqueness of this research is the placing of the parents in the center of the individual coaching process and relating to them as whole and complete

persons, rather than as a parent designed to bare, raise, love and serve children. It primarily deals with one's encounter with oneself even before examining how the notion of parenthood in one's life.



## Chapter 2 - Theoretical background: Literature overview

### Introduction

While the literature review presents theoretical materials related to the major areas of this research, it would be presumptuous to claim to have cited **all** main theories.

The literature reveals that many have examined the effectiveness of counseling, mentoring and parental guidance programs. In spite of the numerous programs existing in Israel that are intended to provide support for parents, I have found no recent comprehensive qualitative research that has set out to examine any effects the **individual parental coaching** process might have had on improving communication with adolescents.

### A. From birth to adolescence - Early childhood development

In his book "*the disappearance of childhood*", first published in 1985, Neil Postman scans the development of the concept of childhood. Up to the 16th century, children were treated as miniature adults. Society was layered mainly by social status, rather than by age groups. Childhood ended when children acquired enough skills to be able to enter the world of labor. These kinds of behaviors were partly due to the existential difficulties which families had to endure, and partly to the lack of understanding of children's special needs. In addition to that, there are the horrifying statistics of infant death rates in those days, which influenced the relations established between parents and children. Children were often viewed simply as small versions of adults, and little attention was paid to the many changes in cognitive abilities, language usage, and physical growth that occur during childhood and adolescence. There was no perception of child development or the adolescence period, and there were no special services or products designed for children.

According to Postman (1985) it was the development of print that launched the period where childhood was acknowledged as a distinct entity, since the ability to read and write became the distinction between adulthood and childhood.

Entering the desired adult world, could be achieved by mastering the art of the written word. It was around this time that special words were invented categorizing different parts of life, such as adulthood and childhood, especially in the UK. Around the 18<sup>th</sup> century, childhood was already acknowledged as an important and separate phase of life, and new analogies of children where they were described as young plants that needed to be nourished, were spread.

The contemporary approach to the study of child development, evolved in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it had become a full-fledged scientific discipline (Berk, 2015). A variety of theoretical frameworks for childhood and children's development reflect different assumptions regarding the primacy of particular aspects of development. Understanding the many ways and variations of children's development is crucial, since it shows appreciation for the cognitive, emotional, physical, social, and educational growth that children undergo, from birth through adolescence and into early adulthood. The theories try to explain and even predict children's behaviors and the way in which child development affects and shapes their entire lifespan.

Over the years, many theoreticians were interested in this new field resulting in many new theories. These are a few of the most central and most widely accepted ones:

- **Freud's** psychosexual stage theory – according to his theory, child development spans over five stages, each one related to different pleasure areas of the body, and each one with its own developmental theme. During each stage, the child encounters conflicts that play a significant role in the course of development. According to Freud, conflicts met during each stage, might have a lifelong influence on personality and behavior (Lewis, 1983;Freud & Strachey, 1964).
- **Erikson's** psychosocial stage theory - In contrast to Freud's focus on sexuality, Erikson focused on how identity is developed. He outlined an eight-stage theory of psychosocial development, relating to growth and change throughout life from the point of view of social interactions and

conflicts. He believed that patterns developing in childhood would influence a person's future actions and interactions. Failure to achieve the appropriate developmental milestone predicts difficulties in dealing with future psychosocial crises (Erikson, 1967).

- **Kohlberg's** moral understanding stage theory - a typology that includes three levels of moral development, specifying the process of distinguishing right from wrong and internalizing a deep sense of morality. He believed that each stage is built on the understanding and abilities gained in the prior stage. According to Kohlberg, moral development is a lifelong task, which many people fail to achieve (Kohlberg, 1981).
- **Piaget's** cognitive development stage theory - a well-known and highly influential theory in the field of child cognitive development. (Doherty & Hughes, 2009). Piaget's theory describes four stages and focuses on the changes in children's thinking and reasoning as well as their adaptation to the environment. He claimed that Infants and young children comprehend the world differently than adults, and that by interacting with the environment, playing and exploring, their minds and thinking abilities evolve, so as to fit changing realities (Berk, 2015;Green, 2016).
- **Bowlby's** Attachment Theory - one of the earliest theories of social development. Bowlby believed that early relationships with caregivers play a major role in child development and continue to influence social relationships throughout life. His attachment theory suggested that children are born with an instinctive inclination to connect. It serves as a biological survival mechanism, which keeps the infant in the proximity of his or her caregiver in times of threat, and when in need of protection and care. Caregivers possess a caregiving structure, which enables them to respond to children's distress and needs and grant them a safe haven and a secure base for exploration. Bowlby's original work defined several attachment profiles, which other researchers expanded upon over the years. In general - Children receiving consistent support and care are more likely to develop a secure attachment style, as opposed to children

who learn to rely less on secure care, which can result in developing an ambivalent, avoidant, or disorganized form of attachment (Johow et al., 2014; Bowlby, 1977).

- **Vygotsky's** Sociocultural Theory - an influential theory especially in the field of education, claiming that learning is an inherently social process. Vygotsky's theory describes how children's minds develop through social connections with significant others, such as parents, teachers or peers. Higher order of thinking abilities evolved in the course of social interactions and constant dialogue, resulting in the transformation of the interpersonal process into an intrapersonal one. He referred to the "zone of proximal development" which claims that by the help of others, children are able to advance their learning, acquire skills and broaden their understanding (Vygotsky, 1978).
- **Bronfenbrenner's** ecological systems theory - influenced by the general ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner claimed that everything in the child's world and environment affects and shapes how he or she grows and develops. According to him, the child is placed in the center of four concentric circles of environment: the microsystem (home – family), the mesosystem (extended family and friends), the exosystem (cultural system outside) and the macro system (the larger society) (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

## **B. Adolescence**

In Western society, adolescence begins at an early age and ends much later than we expect. It is therefore considered a significant period in the human life cycle. Many theoreticians and psychologists have investigated the roles, behaviors, connections and ramifications of these meaningful years. It began in ancient times when Aristotle referred to teenagers as being *"heated by nature as drunken men by wine"*. His predecessor Socrates claimed that it is in their nature to *"contradict their parents"* (Arnett, 1999).

Stanley Hall (1904) is considered by many to be the first psychologist to take on a scientific approach to adolescence. At the core of his book lies the biogenetic approach, which considers adolescence (from puberty through 25) as a period of "storm and stress", a description that was used by many of my research participants to describe their adolescent children.

This description reflects emotional instability and frequent fluctuations between emotional extremes. He described 12 basic oppositions in the mental life of adolescents in the effort to explain the characteristics of this age group. One of his insights encouraged parents and educators to allow adolescents to express the full scale of their emotions. Although Hall's general developmental principles have long been refuted by modern science, his sharp insight into the psychology of adolescence continues to be valuable today (Jackson & Goossens, 2006).

S. Freud (1953) was not very interested in adolescence and instead focused more on the earlier stages of development, which he considered to be the formative ones. Freud developed a comprehensive theory regarding the psychopathology in personality development – the psychoanalytical approach. He believed that all psychological events are driven by energy, urges and instincts. According to Freud, adolescence was fraught with sexual excitement, anxiety, sometimes personality disturbance and the loosening of emotional ties with the parents who previously were the objects of sexual desires. Detachment from parental authority is, according to Freud, one of the most painful psychological achievements during the period of adolescence, disclosing the conflict between the generations while marking a cornerstone of social progress.

His daughter, Anna Freud placed more emphasis on researching the adolescent years (Freud, 1969). She noted that this period is one of internal conflict, psychological disequilibrium and erratic behavior, caused by tensions and struggles between the drives and the ego. She thought that one of the primary tasks of adolescents is the integration of adult sexuality into their developing personality. She stressed the oscillations of adolescents, their fluctuating

between opposite modes of behavior, resulting in the emergence of two new defense mechanisms:

Intellectualization - when personal emotional conflicts are transformed into abstract arguments.

Asceticism - when adolescents who fear of losing control over sexual impulses essentially deny themselves any pleasure.

Blos (1979) maintained that adolescence is a second separation-individuation phase in life, and offered some new psychoanalytical insights. According to Blos, the first separation occurs in the first 2-3 years of life, as young children start to distance themselves physically from their mothers and strive to achieve physical autonomy. The second is the adolescents' struggle to distance themselves psychologically from their parents, to disengage from infantile objects and enter into the world of adults.

By contrast, Laufer (1995) proposed a return to Freud's original theory. They stressed that the formation of irreversible sexual identity should be the main developmental function in adolescence.

Mead (1973) studied features of girls' adolescence on the Samoan island, and concluded that the "storm and stress" characteristic of adolescence is far from universal and depends on the cultural milieu of the Western civilization. After Mead's death, Freeman (1983) challenged the validity of her research and claimed that she misunderstood the Samoan culture. The analysis of the Mead/Freeman controversy indicates that despite several deficiencies in Mead's work, her main conclusion – that "storm and stress" is not universal and is largely determined by a cultural context – remains the ruling perception (Côté, 1992).

This perhaps points to the need for research such as the present one. This study is context-specific and rooted in the Israeli culture, taking into consideration the cultural aspect of being a parent in Israel.

Piaget (1958) looked at adolescence through the lens of cognitive development, moving from concrete thinking to a higher, more sophisticated and abstract

form of rational thinking. An anecdote that exemplifies the developing abstract understanding of this age came from one of the teenagers that took part in this research. His mother (one of the participating parents), told him that she is going to one of our sessions. In reply, he said to her:

*"Ahhh, you are going to meet the person who made you change so much..."*

One of the most important and accepted researchers of the human life cycle, Erik Erikson (1994a) saw the identity formation as the central process in adolescence. Erikson postulated eight developmental psychosocial stages: four that take place during childhood, one at adolescence and three throughout adulthood. Each stage has its own developmental theme – a specific psychosocial crisis, which results in a basic virtue – strength of ego. Failure to solve this conflict positively, according to Erikson, creates difficulties in dealing with future psychosocial crises. Adolescents confront the question of identity – how to establish a coherent sense of personal identity, reconciling between *"the person one has come to be"* and *"the person society expects one to become"* (Erikson, 1994b). Erikson coined the term "psychosocial moratorium" – an accepted social delay of commitments, allowing for free experimentation with various social roles without facing the attached responsibilities, where adolescents are granted the time they need to integrate the elements of their identity.

Arnett (1999) argued that while many earlier studies rejected the claim of universal adolescent "storm and stress," contemporary research consistently supports a modified "storm and stress" thesis. Adolescence is a time when varieties of problems are more likely to arise than at any other stage in life. This specific statement is the one that motivated me to start my professional voyage in working with groups of parents of adolescents, which eventually led me to conduct this research. Arnett distinguished between three main aspects of the "storm and stress" concept: conflict with parents, mood disruptions, and risk behavior. According to Arnett, the main difference between Western societies who value individualism, and cultures that are more traditional, is the degree of independence allowed by adults and expected by adolescents.

Finally, Bohleber (2012), who is a contemporary psychoanalytical adolescent theoretician, emphasized the adolescent cognitive abilities and the central role that newly acquired abstract thinking capacities play in the adolescents' ability to liberate themselves from primary relationships.

### **B.1 Attachment at adolescence**

During the time that adolescents are developing competences, we witness a strong need to explore and enter new environments and form new bonds. These processes result in an inherent tension and need to recreate the balance between attachment behaviors and exploratory needs; all attachment processes take place under the wide umbrella of the teenagers' struggle for autonomy (Allen et al., 2016). However, it seems that despite rapidly changing social experiences, adolescence still appears to be a time of relative attachment stability, even though lower than in adulthood. Cases of crisis, family conflict, parental divorce, etc. undermine the stability of adolescent attachment. Teens with secure attachment tend to handle conflicts with parents using a productive problem-solving discussion (Allen et al., 2016) as opposed to insecure attached children, who tend to have difficulties regulating emotions and experience uneasy interactions with their peers (Kerns & Brumariu, 2014). A secure attachment style in adolescence, especially with mothers, is usually associated with better social abilities (Gross et al., 2017), while disorganized attachment styles are connected with parent - teenager's mal-interactions, which might cause negative outcomes in many aspects (Obsuth et al., 2014).

### **C. Parenting**

It is almost common knowledge that becoming a parent is one of the most significant, challenging and complicated roles in one's life, one that we arrive at with no degree, manual or guidance. It has been vastly investigated and researched in an attempt to explain the complexity of the parenting role while trying to define the "best" parenting model. Since parents were at the heart of



this research, extensive reading was done in order to map as many possible typologies.

One of the most respected and active researchers in that field, Diana Baumrind (1966) based her typology of parenting styles on two aspects of parenting which she considered to be very important:

- "Parental responsiveness"- the degree to which a parent responds to the child's needs.
- "Parental demandingness" - parental expectations of maturity and responsible behavior from a child.

Based on these dimensions, Baumrind identified three different parenting styles: **permissive, authoritarian and authoritative** and their effects on children's behavior. Baumrind's typology is largely accepted as a comprehensive parenting model and has been developed, studied and widely discussed in the literature, (Mensah & Kuranchie, 2013). In recent years, yet another parenting style was added to Baumrind initial typology - the Rejecting/Neglecting Parenting Style (as specified on p. 17).

During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a more liberal, democratic and individualistic approach towards parenting arose, as reflected in more recent studies. Meredith (1986) promoted the idea of democracy in the family, with democratic parenting based on the principles of Adlerian psychology. Recent empirical research (Miklikowska & Hurme, 2011) confirms that democratic parenting influences adolescents' moral development and results in the formation of democratic values.

According to Oryan & Gastil (2013) a child should be regarded as a vulnerable human being with authentic individuality and democratic values. They claim that the child, as an individual, should not be governed by the autocratic power of his or her parents.

However, careful analysis shows internal inconsistencies and contradictions between democratic principles and recommended parental practices. Joussemet (2008) proposed the application of the principles of self-

determination theory to parenting. Self-determination is defined as the fundamental need of all human beings to feel, competent and autonomous in order to develop optimally.

In taking a non-cognitive approach, Dix (1991) viewed parenting first and foremost as an emotional experience. He proposed an affective model of parenting that features three aspects; it emphasizes the child, the parents and the contextual factors that activate parent's emotions. Yet another approach was delineated by Holden (1983), who stressed the importance of proactive parenting practices. He believed that proactive control might have productive effects on social development. According to Padilla-Walker (2011), proactive parenting involves anticipatory rather than reactive techniques.

Hoghghi (2004) defined parenting as purposive activities aimed at ensuring the survival and the development of children, with parental activities falling into three categories: care, control and development. Functional areas of parenting include physical health, intellectual and educational functioning, social behavior and mental health.

Parenting, according to Pecnic (2007), has kept in step with society, thus moving towards a more holistic concept of parenting. Pecnic emphasizes the interactions between parenting resources and capacities, the child's developmental needs, the family plus environmental factors.

It should be taken into consideration, that different cultures produce different sets of values, and therefore construct different types of parental emphasis, as pointed out by Bornstein (2012). Culture-specific factors shape fundamental decisions about behaviors parents promote in their children, and how this consequently affects their interactions with them. For instance, American mothers try to promote autonomy, assertiveness, verbal competence and self-actualization in their children while Japanese mothers try to promote emotional maturity, self-control, social courtesy and social interdependency in theirs. Throughout the research process, it was interesting to meet different types of

parents although they are all Israeli parents, sharing many similar characteristics, values, challenges and cultural backgrounds.

### **C.1. Israeli families and parenting**

In their 2003 research, Lavee & Katz (2003) claim that Israeli families are torn between two opposing poles - modernization and Westernization, versus traditional values. Israeli families, similar to western families, have experienced significant changes to the family structure, as a result of the increase in alternative civil marriages (as opposed to the acceptable religious variation), marriages later in life, co-habitation, etc. On one hand, Israeli families tend to be stronger and more stable than families in other industrialized nations, maybe due to the fact that the divorce rate is significantly lower. Families usually have more children, gender roles are more traditional, and in addition, Jewish tradition relies heavily on the concept of family. On the other hand, a large diversity of family structures is obvious, especially among secular Jewish families. Nonetheless, children are considered the most important part of a person's life, almost to the point where life is thought of as not worth living without them, as described in Lavee & Katz (2003):

*"Israel is a "child-oriented" society. Married couples are expected to have children, and a childless couple is not considered a family. Nearly 60% of Israelis believe that childless people have an "empty life," and more than 80% believe that "the greatest joy in life is to follow children's growing up" (Lavee & Katz, 2003:203)*

Children are seen as the center of the family; this conclusion is largely manifested in my research findings, since all parents claimed that children are the **most important** thing in their lives. Children are considered central to the entire Israeli society, where we find that children's needs are prioritized for a longer period than in other societies (Lavee & Katz, 2003), as will be elaborated upon in the next paragraphs.

To some extent, the family decision-making process is still rather traditional in Israel as mothers, despite the fact that they are also working outside of the home, are nevertheless the more dominant decision-makers with regard to childcare and education. This also correlates with my research findings since it was obvious that the mothers were the ones to initiate the search for parental guidance and convey the willingness to participate.

Although similar stress factors apply to Israeli families as in other countries, Israeli families and parents face an extra set of worries. The Israeli-Arab conflict brings with it repeated wars, terrorist attacks, and other security-related issues (such as mandatory army service), all of which are great stress inducers. Fogiel-Bijaoui and Rutlinger-Reiner (2013) confirm the above conclusions that Israel is experiencing similar global (western world) processes of individualization attributed to post-modernism. However, the authors agree that familyism, meaning the centrality of the normative family in the life of the individual, remains the identifying mark of Israeli society. Since marriage is still considered the most acceptable and legitimate framework for having children, it is the children and not the individual, who constitute the foundation of marriage. Hence, the main role of women in Israel remains that of wife and mother.

As a native Israeli woman, I know from firsthand experience, that at a certain age, the two most frequent questions women are asked in any given social interaction, are – "*are you married?*" and "*Do you have children?*" If the answer is yes, the next question is quickly to follow - "*how many children do you have*". Being a mother of a single child, I have been exposed many times to both upfront and implied criticism, regarding the fact that I only "made" one child. If the answer to these questions is NO, then the conversation will take a turn to a series of suggestions, instructions and offers to help, regarding how to "find" a husband and start a family, all of which is accompanied by a worried and merciful glance.

Another study conducted by Scharf (2014) reaffirms the above noted centrality in his description of reasons for Israel remaining such a familial and close-knit society. Israeli parents prefer their relationships with their children to be close

and tight partly due to dangerous and unpredictable environments, this allows them a sense of being more able to protect their offspring in the case of life threatening events. It might be this stressful environment that keeps the parent-child bond close through life beyond childhood, adolescence and even young adulthood. This close relationship with parents does not mean that Israeli youth are more obedient or respectful, since they are not. Many teens perceive the main parental role as one where the parents are – *"to indulge their children and fulfill their requests"* (Scharf, 2014:200) . Many Israeli youth consider themselves close to their parents but expect low monitoring, few limits and low rule-enforcement by their parents. Perhaps this leniency is a mirror to child centrality in the sense that children's needs, self-actualization and happiness, are the most important things parents should worry about. There may be a few explanations as to why Israeli parents behave as they do. Paradoxically, it seems that parents who have experienced strict parental practices as children, tend to "go easy" on their children a little too much, as described by Scharf (2014:203) as in a "pendulum movement":

*"They suggest that parents may attempt to establish exactly the opposite type of relationship with their children to that which they had with their own parents. Thus, a strict disciplinary experience may lead parents to be unwilling to impose any limits on their children or cause them frustration".*

This is very well demonstrated in one of the research questions – ***"To what extent do you feel your connection with your teenager is similar to the one you had with your parents as a teenager?"***

Approximally a third of the parents (5 parents) felt their connection with the teenagers is similar to the one they had with theirs, as becomes clear in Si's and Hez's words:

***Interviewer:*** *how similar to your dad, do you think you are?*

***Hez:*** *60-70 percent, like him*

***Interviewer:*** *it's quite a lot*

***Hez:*** *for sure* (body language indicates the number is even higher)

***Si:*** *I am about 50 %*

Over half of the parents (8 parents) felt there was very little similarity.

These findings seem to support the view that parents wish not to behave as theirs did, although during the coaching sessions, most of them said that the main model of parenthood they knew was the one they experienced as children in their parents' homes. Another possible explanation is that parents tend to pamper their children knowing life is going to be difficult and challenging enough in the future (Scharf, 2014). In addition, parents might avoid using their authority because of feelings of guilt over having stayed out for many hours, as dual career couples do, and for having little energy left to invest in parenting once they are at home. A recent study by Sinai-Glazer and Peled (2016) examined the role of Israeli mothers and motherhood, once again emphasizing the central place given to family, marriage and childrearing. Tradition and religion treat motherhood as the top priority for any woman, and within Israeli society, it is perceived as being of national importance, thus making the mother and wife roles prominent and self-evident for Israeli Jewish women. Given the unstable national security situation in Israel, the family is viewed as a safe haven and therefore one of the most important and demanding institutions in Israeli society, putting a lot of responsibility on mothers as the main caretakers in their families.

The arena of Israeli fatherhood has not been as thoroughly researched as that of motherhood and family. Yet, in his book "fathers across cultures" Roopnarine (2015) decides to devote a chapter especially to Israeli fathers and fatherhood. In this chapter, Strier contemplates over different aspects of Israeli fatherhood. He finds Israeli fathers are in constant change, but it is a slow process, and it is not identical in the various parts of Israeli society. Shapira (2013) (in Roopnarine, 2015) has found that secular Jewish fathers show a greater involvement in their children's affairs and there is more equal labor division in household matters than before. Israeli fathers are in constant conflict, as they challenge old traditions regarding fatherly roles, in the face of the globalization, modernization, westernization, and industrial environment in the State of Israel.

Khativ Abed El-Hai (2011) (in Roopnarine, 2015) finds that Israeli fathers these days, both Jewish and Palestinian, are more active in childcare activities in comparison to their own fathers, who unlike them, were more distant, used an authoritarian parenting style and would employ physical punishments. As in most other industrialized nations, the breadwinner role is still a major factor in the modern Israeli perception of fatherhood and masculinity (Connell, 2005; Nelson 2004; Nonn, 2007 in Roopnarine, 2015). Fathers are still facing the need to prove their self-sufficiency in being able to properly provide for the family, by holding a decent job (Baxandall, 2004 in Roopnarine, 2015). The negative effect of living in constant fear of war, terrorism and other dangerous situations, which Sharf (2014) linked to the reasons for close-knit family relations as mentioned above, play a specific role in Israeli fatherhood (Baaz, 2009; Shepard, 2000 in Roopnarine 2015). In general, fathers, as men are traditionally expected to be responsible for the family's safety and security. In Israel, fathers are dealing with these issues on many levels – as citizens, as soldiers, and as fathers of young children that will become soldiers at the age of 18.

### **C.2. Post-modernistic Parenthood**

Up until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, children were considered the "property" of their parents. Parents were utterly in charge, they were the sole decision makers, and the hierarchy between parent child, was very rigid and explicit (Jenkins, 1998). Approximately towards the end of the 19th century and into the 20th century, due to global processes such as - urbanization, extended life expectancy, the development of science, enhanced psychological understanding and child psychology and the establishment of a formal education system, the concept of childhood as a crucial phase of life, was widely accepted. Alongside these processes, the concept of the "parental role" evolved, a concept that was massively changed during this "century of the child", as it has been referred to by many (Michalson, 2000). The nuclear modern monogamous family that consists of a married couple with at least one child, was considered the ideal family type (Elkind, 2009; Dizard & Gadlin, 1992). Each member of the family

had a clearly defined role – most mothers stayed home, took care of the household, and were expected to educate their children according to the strict educational concepts that were acceptable at the time. Many fathers were expected to earn the family livelihood. Children were supposed to study, listen to their parents and be well-behaved. This kind of distinction assured the fulfillment of the parental roles - meet children's needs, keep them safe and provide guidance. Parent-children interactions were subject to a strict set of behavioral codes and expectations, which were based on the absolute parental authority that included a clear hierarchy and well-known definitions of what is permitted and what is prohibited. Parents were perceived by their children as skillful and "all-knowing" and there was no place for undermining them (Elkind, 2009; Dizard & Gadlin, 1992).

The new era of humanistic approaches that began emerging during the fifties and sixties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, were social and liberal in nature and began to have a strong effect on the perception of parenthood. This was followed by the "post-modern" times, a progression that resulted in massive changes in family structures and parent- children relationships. While modern times were characterized by the belief in an objective reality and the existence of clear and binding values derived from it, the post-modern era brought with it a sense of transience, arbitrariness and loss of absolute values. The exclusive modern ideologies were largely replaced with the notion that everything is questionable, debatable, relative and pluralistic (Aviram, 1994). On one hand, this major change produced great social openness and equality, but on the other hand, it was also the cause for a lack of clear role definition's, confusion in boundaries and ambiguity in many areas of life, including the concept of family. The "ideal" modern family structure was challenged by the recognition of divers types of families that had previously been considered unacceptable, such as unmarried couples, single-parent families, or families headed by same-sex couples (Omer, 2000). The members of the modern family were changing: Women began joining the workforce and pursuing careers, fathers were more actively taking part in household chores, and new values became central in parents' lives. Self-



fulfillment, individual rights and a great emphasis on the individual's special abilities and needs, led to the acknowledgment that children's thoughts, wishes and opinions count. Parents were called upon to give children unconditional love, containment and support.

In looking at the new millennium, we see further strain put on parents. Stearns (2004: ix), who researched American parenting patterns, suggests some determinants that changed the parental role during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

*"The basic argument is not complicated. Several decades back, many American parents, and those who advised them, began to change their ideas about children's nature, attributing to it a greater sense of vulnerability and frailty. This new view then influenced the handling of matters within the family, such as discipline and chores. It also affected the ways parents tried to mediate between children and other experiences that affected them, such as schooling or recreation. Some of our most striking practices, from grade inflation to worries about children's boredom, result from the intersection of beliefs in vulnerability and the influence of wider social institutions."*

He claims that the range of parental responsibilities has increased, including the requirement to attend to emotional development, physical wellbeing, and an over-involvement in the child's world such as - School, friends and recreation. In addition, due to advanced technology and greater exposure to information, parents need to mediate the contents of the external world to their children. According to Stearns, parents are being affected by new levels of parenting anxiety and parental satisfaction has been declining during much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bernstein (2010) presents modern parenthood as portrayed by the "intensive parents", as today's parents are much more involved in their children's lives than were parents of previous generations. Locke (2012) claims that *"Today, the child is king"* (2012:1221) and calls this new social phenomenon "over-parenting", which is characterized by the intrusive presence in the child's life, the elevated anxiety regarding the child, and the overprotection of children from the consequences of their own doing. There certainly are advantages to such involved parenting, however Locke points out the possible repercussions such "over-parenting" can have: children demonstrating low resilience,

deficiency in life skills, lack of coping mechanism and high anxiety, just to name a few.

In summary, contemporary parents find themselves in a state of confusion, unable to choose a coherent parental-educational agenda, in times where all is acceptable and negotiable as Dor (2004) describes as "the parental fog". Parents are maneuvering between the desire to be considered "good" parents, and their striving to succeed as individuals in a materialistic, consuming, technological and demanding world.

#### **D. Parent-Adolescent Relationship**

As mentioned above, adolescence is one of the most conflict-ridden periods in parent-child relations. During adolescent years, everything is subjected to criticism and becoming a potential argument. As partially explained by Montemayor (1983), this deterioration has two components: an increase in parent-adolescent conflict and the parental loss of power and influence over their adolescent child.

There is certainly more than one way to explain parent-adolescent conflict. Smetana (1988) argued that the changes in the adolescent-parent relationship, can be meaningfully understood if we account for the very different ways in which adolescents and their parents interpret social situations. Conflicts emerge when the boundaries of legitimate parental authority are renegotiated. What begins over seemingly trivial matters will become routine conflicts as they continuously reflect the differences between parent and child in the ways they define and frame the issues at hand. What is perceived by parents as "codes of right and wrong" might be considered by teenagers as "matters of personal choices", for instance - keeping a clean room.

Laursen (1998) described two key parameters of the conflict: conflict rate (the frequency of the conflict) and conflict affect (the emotional intensity of the conflict). In a series of meta-analyses, they concluded that the parent-child conflict rate declines, as the adolescent grows older.

Allen and Land (1999) examined relationships from the point of view of the attachment theory. Adolescent behavior toward attachment figures represents a clear break from prior patterns of attachment behavior. While decreased reliance of adolescents on parents as attachment figures reflects their relative independence from their parents, it does not mean that the relationship as a whole is no longer important to them.

Another theory presented by Younis and Ketterlinus (1987) suggests that the parent-adolescent conflict originates in the dichotomy between the child's ambition to separate from the parent as he establishes his/her own unique self, as this is counterbalanced by the desire to maintain the parental connection for validation and approval of their new self.

Empirical studies of communication in families show different communication patterns between parents and their daughters and sons. In later research conducted by Jackson (1998) it was found that in most adolescents, boys and girls alike, maternal communication tended to be more open and less problematic than paternal communication. Results of this study also showed that good parental communication is associated with positive feelings of self-worth and other aspects of well-being.

Koesten and Anderson (2004) examined two different types of family communication patterns - socio-oriented versus concept-oriented communication, and suggested they are correlated to the level of adolescents' cognitive complexity and interpersonal competences. It can be assumed that adolescents who were exposed to concept-oriented communication are more likely to adapt to developmental changes.

It is worthy of mention that adolescents are not passive receivers of family communication patterns; Saphir (2002) claims that adolescent socialization and communication also affect family communication in return.

It is not surprising to find that family relationships are replicated in adolescent relationships within their peer group, as shown in the empirical study of adolescents' perceptions of their family relationships. It appeared that these

perceptions predicted their experiences with peers and similarly their peer experiences predicted later possible problematic behavior (Goldstein et al., 2005).

For many parents, the daunting task of adolescent parenting is rather challenging. There are many parameters, which influence this inherent complex relationship, the age of the parents at the time of their children's adolescence being one of them. Steinberg (2002) studied the influence of adolescent transition on parents, and found that most parents are close to 40 years old when their first child enters into adolescence which is likely to compound a "midlife crisis."

Laible and Carlo (2004) examined the different relationships of maternal (emphasis on support) and paternal (emphasis on control) parenting dimensions, regarding the outcomes of adolescent characteristics and behavior in three domains: sympathy, social competence and self-worth. As one might expect, the results showed distinct differences between perceived maternal and paternal attitudes.

Finally, in a longitudinal study, Friesen (2013) showed the importance of close parent-child relations in the adolescent period and its positive impact on adult parenting behavior more than 15 years later.

## **E. Coaching**

Although coaching is a rather new methodology in the field of "helping others", it has been widely studied and investigated. One of the founding fathers of the discipline, Martin Seligman (2007), a leading authority in Positive Psychology, challenges the focus of psychoanalysis on the pathological parts of the human soul, instead of empowering the positive resources, abilities and strengths. This view is supported by Maddux (2004) who outlines how the illness ideology of clinical psychology emphasizes abnormality over normality, poor adjustment over healthy adjustment, and sickness over health. In general, this ideology portrays people who seek help as passive victims instead of focusing on positive psychology, a concept that rejects categorization and stigmatizing of pathology and instead views 'patients' as having "problems with living" as opposed to people with disorders or diseases.

Joseph (2006) stressed two conflicting approaches to human personality: a person-centered approach and a medical approach. Clinical and counseling psychology represents the medical model, while Rogers (in Joseph, 2006), whose aim was not to repair or cure dysfunction or assign expert status to therapists, primarily developed the person-centered approach. He believed that human beings have an innate tendency toward growth, development, and optimal functioning.

Williams (2002) traced the roots of coaching back to 20th century psychology and investigated the origin of the term "whole and healthy person." He studied the work of Adler, Jung & Rogers, who considered each person to be unique, whole and capable of change and growth. They had described the individual as an "artist of his or her life", a good definition of a "whole and healthy person."

Kauffman (2006) connected the roots of coaching to the theoretical basis of the above mentioned positive psychology. The heart of positive psychology, like coaching, lies in the practitioner's choice to shift attention away from pathology and pain and direct it toward strength, vision and dreams. The ideology of positive psychology emphasizes goals, well-being, satisfaction, happiness,

interpersonal skills, perseverance, talent, wisdom and personal responsibility. It focuses on understanding what makes life worth living and helping people become more self-organized and self-directed. Seligman (2007) considered positive psychology to be the proper theoretical base for the practice of coaching, a discipline that is in need of a clear theoretical framework and a scientific evidence-based backbone. Beck (2011) agrees that coaching has, and always will search for a psychological theory to which it can be connected.

There are some alternative theories and explanations with regard to the origin and history of coaching, as elaborated and explained in the book "A Critical Introduction to Coaching and Mentoring: Debates, Dialogues and Discourses" (Gray et al., 2016). Here the dawn of coaching goes back to the prehistoric era, where people had to help each other in the learning process of hunting skills. In following that line of thought, the Socratic teaching methods and agenda might be considered 'coaching' in nature. Other theoreticians find the roots for coaching in 19<sup>th</sup> century scholars. The linking of the term "coaching" to the notion of "help" was first made in 1849 in an academic context. A more recent and modern view of coaching history connects it with sports and leads to self-improvement techniques.

### **E.1 A Definition of Coaching:**

The International Coaching Federation's (ICF) definition of coaching is: *"partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential, which is particularly important in today's uncertain and complex environment". According to the ICF, the client is considered to be an "expert in his or her life and work" and in order to earn the right to be a coacher, you must subscribe to the view that every person is "creative, resourceful and whole". Based on that definition, "the coach's responsibility is to discover, clarify and align with what the client wants to achieve, encourage client self-discovery, elicit client-generated solutions and strategies, and hold the client responsible and accountable."*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.coachfederation.org/need/landing.cfm?ItemNumber=978>

The main purpose of the coaching process is to assist the individual in maximizing their strengths, abilities and potential by allowing them to dream and believe in their capability to fulfill that dream. Nelson-Jones (2006) is one of the researchers who have looked more closely at the concept of coaching, and has emphasized the numerous facets of coaching and different approaches to the process. He defined 'life coaching' as a method for helping generally adequately functioning people to learn, improve and maintain their skills, leading them to happier, more productive and fulfilled lives.

Dexter (2010) described life coaching as an activity that aids an individual in fulfilling his or her potential, helping them to feel more directional and to reach higher 'performance' levels in their everyday life.

The field of coaching developed rapidly from the term "life coaching", breaking into sub-categories, such as "relationship skills coaching", "health coaching", "business coaching", "career coaching", all of them subject to an ongoing research and examination.

Beck (2011) found three common features in different variations of coaching: (1) the focus on potential and desires of the individual (2) goal setting for these desires (3) questioning in a way that allows the individuals to find the answers within themselves. Smith (in Vaughan, 2007) stressed the holistic character of the coaching process and that it should accommodate and balance all aspects of the client's life.

The primary and most common stages of coaching are :

- Mapping the "here & now" of the client
- Envisioning the future
- Exploring, testing and clarifying goals
- Generating and evaluating possibilities
- Moving toward action

Dexter (2010) distinguished between two different coaching approaches: belief-based and evidence-based coaching. Belief-based coaching is based on the premise that under favorable conditions people, amongst them parents can and will change, if given the right platform.

Evidence-based coaching suggests that several coaching attributes (such as - international research based knowledge), are crucial for effective and *measurable* changes to be achieved.

Palmer and Williams (in Passmore et al., 2013) describe the development of a cognitive behavioral approach to coaching, which proposes that a person's perception of an event will directly and significantly influence how they feel and behave in response to that event.

Whiteworth and her colleagues (in Kimsey-House et al., 2010) are the founders of the co-active coaching model, which identifies the heart of coaching as the will to change. It is based on the partnership between the coachee and the coach, and the process relies on collaboration and true dialogue between the two.

In summary, over the last two decades, the discipline of coaching has developed and flourished, putting forth various approaches and methodologies that provide answers for different human needs; among them is parental coaching, which is the 'heart and soul' of this research.

## **E.2 Coaching Psychology**

It was in the year of 2002, when Dr. Anthony Grant announced that coaching psychology "came of age" (Grant, 2003). As one of the founders of this new field that came into the world in the new millennium, he established the world's first Coaching Psychology Unit (CPU) at the University of Sydney Australia. The declared mission of CPU, a pioneering unit at this time, was to:

*"enhance the performance, productivity, and quality of life of individuals, organizations, and the broader community through excellence in education, research, and the practice of coaching psychology"* (Grant, 2016:3)

Many definitions and descriptions were given to the emerging field; among them, we can find the following:

*"Coaching psychology is for enhancing performance in work and personal life domains with normal, non-clinical populations, underpinned by models of*



*coaching grounded in established therapeutic approaches" (Grant & Palmer, 2002)*

*"An applied positive psychology, draws on and develops established psychological approaches, and can be understood as being the systematic application of behavioral science to the enhancement of life experience, work performance and wellbeing for individuals, groups and organizations who do not have clinically significant mental health issues or abnormal levels of distress". (Australian Psychological Society, 2007).*

Some can trace the roots of coaching psychology back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the work of Coleman R. Griffith who was studying the psychology of sports, athletes and their trainers (coaches). In the course of the century, other works were published on the connection between coaching, psychology and sports. Others would say that the world of coaching psychology began and developed in the sixties, with the work of humanistic psychologists such as Maslow and Rogers, and later on with the work of Seligman, the founder of positive psychology.

As can be understood from the definitions of coaching noted above, coaching psychology aims to facilitate healthy people (and not people who are clinically diagnosed) to "make the best of themselves", or in the words of Maslow, to achieve 'self-actualization'. All of the above definitions, can also apply to the coaching process in general, so what is the 'added value' of coaching psychology?

The main difference is that coaching psychology brings the psychological theory to the process, including research, evidence based benefits, and proven work methods and models. Most coaches worldwide, will adhere to some form of the GROW model (Goal, Reality, Options, Way forward) without fully understanding the psychological motivations and explanations. As opposed to that, coaches' who are also psychologists or trained in psychology, will use a range of theoretical and evidence based therapeutic approaches such as the psychodynamic approach, the cognitive behavioral theory base or solution-

focused and positive psychology, in order to help their clients reach their goals. It is this focus on the systematic application of evidence based behavioral science, that distinguishes coaching psychology from regular coaching (Palmer & Whybrow, 2014).

The theory, practice and research base of coaching psychology is developing at a fast pace; the future for this growing field, as stated by Cavanagh and Palmer (2006) can be found on several levels:

- The development and validation of psychologically based coaching methodologies.
- The expansion of coaching interventions that make use of existing theory and technique, relevant to nonclinical clientele.
- The conducting of academic research in the fields of human change and well-being.

#### **F. Parental help and Guidance:**

One of those human needs, as mentioned above, is Parental guidance - a process to help contemporary parents cope with the overwhelming challenge of raising teenagers in the modern world. There are parent groups, parental guiding and counseling, parent's education programs, family therapy, etc. Over the last two decades in Israel, we have witnessed an overall growth in the number of parents seeking help, support, and guidance, in order to improve their parenting style and deal with family conflicts. Cohen (2010) explained the concept of parental help programs:

*"In Hebrew, the general term which is used to represent most of those activities, is 'parental guidance'. Parental guidance is an educational-consultancy activity, which aims to aid parents in fulfilling the parental mission: raising and educating children. Parental guidance by its assumption enables the developing of beneficent parenting that contributes to parents and children quality of life, by imparting knowledge, acquiring functional skills and expanding personal awareness. In the educational encyclopedia, parental guidance is described as an intentional action, somewhat systematic and temporary that wishes to equip parents with behavioral*

*codes towards their children. Sometimes the purpose is to directly imbue methods of educating and caring, other times it aims to develop desired ways of personal parental behavior that indirectly influence their children's behavior."*

Many "lost" parents turn to those options as a last resort, trying to fix channels of broken communication and remove the anger, frustration and disappointment that sometimes characterize parent-children relationships during the adolescent years. Among others, parents have turned to Adlerian philosophy centers for help, which holds methodology that is the closest to parental coaching. The Adlerian model of parenting has become very popular, and "parenting schools" that operate according to the Adlerian philosophy have been opened all over the world. This philosophy emphasizes children's psychological and behavioral goals, logical and natural consequences, and the importance of mutual respect and encouragement. Parents are taught effective communication skills, intervention strategies and are instructed to avoid criticism and punishment.

The Adlerian parent program has been vastly examined and researched. Mullis (1999) examined the effects of Adlerian parent education programs on children's and teens' behavior as perceived by their parents. The outcome revealed a significant, more favorable change in the parental perception of their children. McVittie (2009) best described the Adlerian parenting model as a horizontal assumption in which everyone in the family is treated with equal dignity and respect. According to this model, the adults of the family play a clear leadership role – a democratic and still authoritative model of parenting. Results of this empirical study showed that although parents did not completely change their parenting style, nonetheless some significant changes were made, in particular a movement toward the authoritative model - increasing the connection and firmness while decreasing in harshness in their relations. The greatest changes were seen in younger parents, predominantly women with lower income levels as well as those with fewer children.

Prinz (2008) evaluated a school-based Adlerian Parenting Program in Israel named "Hadarim," designed for families with children aged 5-12 years, whose

parents took a course taught by their children's teachers. The "Hadarim" project supports the idea of raising children by democratic means, encouraging parents to rely on their children to establish rules of behavior and auto-sanctions or self-imposed consequences when they break the rules, instead of relying on an authoritarian parenting approach. The empirical study showed that the program had a positive impact on the participating teachers as well as on the parents.

Chang and Ritter (2004) explored the Adlerian parent education and its effectiveness in working with ethnic minority parents. The program was based on principles of encouragement and mutual respect between parents and children. It stressed the importance of the child's private logic as well as logical and natural consequences. Parents are taught to use their own feelings and expectations in order to achieve a better understanding of the child and apply appropriate solutions. The counsellors working with ethnic minority families examined their own biases and sensitivities in order to become more aware of the cultural background and worldviews of the parents. They understood that some aspects of child raising might be culturally based and were able to develop culturally appropriate intervention strategies.

Sommers-Flanagan (2007) considered brief parenting consultation and even single-session parenting consultations to be highly suitable and consistent with the contemporary emphasis on positive, short-term, solution-based approaches to counseling. His consultation model includes six components or phases:

- explaining the consultation process.
- supporting the parent's concerns.
- identifying and exploring the child's problem as viewed by parents.
- modeling effective parental attitudes, such as empathy and compassionate curiosity.
- offering advice regarding behavior management and family communication.
- summarizing the plan and closing the session.

Results, based on the data gathered from parent questionnaires, indicated that parents rated themselves as less stressed and more capable of handling their children's behaviors following their single-session consultation.

Griffith (2010) considered the aim of parent training interventions was to influence parents behavior with regard to defining the best methods for dealing with needs of adolescent-aged youth. According to Griffith, the most logical component of parenting programs is behavioral training, designed to teach parents positive parenting techniques and behavior management strategies. It is based on learning principles and training methods founded in social learning theory and combines class sessions with assigned self-learning activities. The results suggest that the program may be effective for reducing levels of parent stress and decreasing rates of externalizing behavior in youth.

Moran (2004) summarized the characteristics of successful parenting support interventions. According to this study, early interventions report better and more durable outcomes for children, though late intervention is still better than none, and may help parents deal with parenting under stress. Useful behavioral interventions are those that focus on parenting skills and practical advice, while cognitive interventions aimed at changing beliefs, attitudes and self-perceptions.

Lastly, the "rising star" of the para-therapeutic method, is the **parental coaching model**.

Ellam and Palmer (2006) distinguish between the "parent training program" which takes on a directive or instructional approach, and "parent coaching" which is designed to empower parents with the confidence and ability to find the answers themselves, using different models.

Marchant and Young (2001) investigated the effectiveness and adequacy of parent coaches teaching parents positive, proactive skills and the appropriate use of positive reinforcement. The implementation of a gamut of new parenting skills had a powerful impact on children's compliance to their parents.

Another major determinant of parental coaching was pointed out by Bamford (2012), who explained that parental coaching is different from other interventions since the coach is not a "parental expert" trying to "correct" parental mistakes. Instead, the coach engages in asking "powerful questions", this leading to a coaching process that has a significant positive impact on the relationship and communication between parents and children, who learn important communication skills.

In parental coaching, the coaches do not criticize parents for their behavior and do not offer parents a script to follow. The parent coaching approach aims to enable parents to understand themselves first and then their children better.

The basic assumptions are - a strong belief in the parents' ability to succeed, an approach of asking instead of telling, and the belief that people own the solutions to their specific, personal problems.

I developed the following coaching method loyal to the concept of perceiving parents as complete and whole individuals that possess the best and most comprehensive knowledge regarding themselves and their families and having a lot of experience listening and working with parents. I believe, working with the IPC method, can help parents find answers within themselves as to parenting adolescents' issues. The individual parental coaching method (IPC) proposed herein, is unique in the sense that it refers to parents as 'holistic independent individuals' while keeping their parental role in mind. It is designed to give parents an opportunity to focus on themselves as individuals, a somewhat rare opportunity in today's modern life style. The research question derives from the same process the parents are taking - to explore the possible impact of the individual parental coaching process on the relationship & communication between adolescent and parents.

## **Chapter 3 - Methodology**

### **Part 1: Qualitative Research**

#### **Introduction**

The aim of Qualitative research is not to discover or define reality, but rather to explore different interpretations of it (Linclon & Guba, 2000).

Any research seeking to examine attitudes and perceptions cannot use quantitative methods that aim to verify "truths" and theoretical patterns, and essentially deals with measurable phenomena. Qualitative research usually sets out to reveal patterns embedded in reality, to analyze and interpret them, and enable us to examine social phenomena that are not measurable. The parental role, just like the educational one, described by (Sabar Ben-Yehoshua (1990), is a complex and multilayered human function that involves values, perceptions and agendas that cannot be measured by quantitative means.

This aim of this research was not to prove any particular theory, but rather to discover possible influences that coaching as a para-therapeutic procedure might have on self-perception and behavioral changes in parents.

#### **Research design**

The following paragraph outlines the research design and is followed with elaboration sections regarding the methodologies used in this research. The research applies mainly qualitative methods for collecting data, yet, alongside it combines some quantitative methods aiming to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the investigated phenomena.

In its core it is qualitative research, with most of the data presented gathered from the coaching sessions held with the participating parents. The research is based on the experiences, perceptions and thoughts parents shared, discussed and realized during these sessions. It is their voices that are presented in the work. The qualitative data embedded throughout the dissertation, enables a deep understanding in identifying, presenting and explaining the main themes

that emerged over the course of the sessions. Issues related to qualitative methodology, are elaborated on sections A, B, C, D, E beginning on p. 56

In the wish to broaden the qualitative data and enrich it with descriptive statistical approaches, a quantitative tool was used in a sequential exploratory design (Hanson et al. 2005) as two phases of questionnaires. The process of creating and administrating the questionnaires, both pre and post coaching are fully elaborated on section F p.70. In this format, the qualitative and quantitative data were collected separately, and were combined at the interpretation and discussion stage, as presented by Hanson et al (2005:229):

*"In these designs, qualitative data are collected and analyzed first, followed by quantitative data. Priority is usually unequal and given to the qualitative data. Quantitative data are used primarily to augment qualitative data. Data analysis is usually connected, and integration usually occurs at the data interpretation stage and in the discussion."*

Combining a quantitative tool into qualitative research is a widespread methodological approach that enables a fuller, more detailed perception and understanding of the investigated issue. Venkatesh et al (2013) refer to it as a Complementarity and Completeness purposes. This approach is consistent with one of the five types of mixed method design, suggested by Creswell & Plano Clark (2011) – "Embedded Design". In this type, one set of data is within the other set, the collection and analysis of the second data set may occur before, during, and/or after the first data collection.

There were two main equally significant goals in using questionnaires - add a quantitative dimension that can shed some light on change processes experienced by the parents in an additional form but words, which is a more easy and straightforward manner. In addition, the questionnaires opened the option to receive empirical information from the teenagers that took a passive part in this research as stated by Hanson et al (2005:229):

*"These designs are useful for gaining a broader perspective on the topic at hand and for studying different groups, or levels, within a single study."*



## **A. Choosing Qualitative Research Method**

Qualitative research has developed tremendously over the past years, with steadily growing literature presenting numerous theories and methods for gathering and analyzing data. It is easy to get lost in the abundance of qualitative analysis methods; some of which are very similar to each other, which makes it difficult to distinguish between them.

Nevertheless, there are a few major distinct traditions that are recognized and widely used, as described in the book: "Five ways of doing qualitative analysis" (Wertz et al., 2011). All the specified main traditions were considered options for conducting and analyzing this research.

The next paragraph presents and discusses them in accordance to their relevance to this research.

### **A1.1 Phenomenological Psychology**

This theoretical approach emphasizes the centrality and importance of one's life experiences, and subjective interpretation. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the theory was conceived by the philosopher Edmund Husserl, the founding father of phenomenological psychology. It evolved and embedded itself into the field of psychology during the sixties, the main claim being that every person is a unique entity and therefore cannot be categorized into any specific, set theory. This method would have been fitting for this research, if the focus had been on the uniqueness of each participating parent. However, the aim here was to examine a method for improving the individuals experience as a parent and required looking for common denominators rather than focusing on individual details.

### **A.1.2 Grounded Theory**

The theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss during the mid-sixties, whilst engaged in research that was conducted on dying patients. With this theory, researchers studied any given reality with an open mind, and then tried to structure a systematic theory, based on and derived from the collected data in the field (Faggiolani, 2011).

Neither was this method suitable to this specific research, since the goal was to explore the answer to a definite question, rather than letting the question emerge from the field.

### **A.1.3 Discourse (conversation) Analysis**

The theory and practice of discourse analysis was shaped and influenced by many philosophers and scholars, Wittgenstein, Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, to name just a few (Wertz et al., 2011). This theory evolved out of linguistics and anthropology, but in the last few decades, it developed and expanded by using other academic disciplines, such as psychology, literary criticism and philosophy, while each discipline uses a different interpretation of the term. This method focuses on the use of language, meticulous examination of linguistic connections, repetitions, pauses, interruptions and emphasis (Maschler & Schiffrin, 2015). There is no doubt that the study of words and their application is a powerful tool. It even has the ability to shape reality, but in this research, the perception of the "bigger picture" – a global view of the process, was more relevant than the use of specific wording.

### **A.1.4 Text analysis**

Textual analysis is most often used to analyze documents and narratives within the historical, social, economic and cultural context of place and time. This interdisciplinary qualitative method is used to analyze cultural artifacts – papers, songs, advertisements, TV shows and other forms of media.

Although analyzing textual transcripts of coaching session were used in this research, the emphasis was not on the use of words, the meaning of them, or grammatical phrases (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010), but rather on the meaning behind the words that might explain the reasons behind people's behavior, and the possibility for change.

### **A.1.5 Intuitive Inquiry**

A rather new methodology of conducting and analyzing qualitative data was developed in the field of transpersonal psychology in the mid-90ies. It originated in the traditional European hermeneutics of analyzing sacred artifacts. It emphasizes the intuitive importance of all research stages, and stresses that interpreting data is procedural rather than linear. It involves passion, intuition and compassion throughout the entire research process (Anderson & Braud, 2011).

Both personally, as well as professionally as a coach and a researcher, I was impressed with this intelligent yet sensitive methodology, and could very much relate to this type of methodology for my research and myself. Yet, I felt that it places a great deal of emphasis on the researcher, while at the center of my study are the participating parents and their communication channels with their teenagers.

### **A.1.6 Narrative Research**

There is no one distinct "father" to the narrative use in psychology, it can be found in the works of Freud, Piaget, Allport, and Erikson, all of whom used narrative methodologies in their practice and analysis. However, they did not refer to themselves as the founders of narrative methodology. Some say it is an old methodology since people have always been telling stories about their lives (Clandinin, 2006) and as described by Hiles and Cěrmá (2008) - the human interest in life stories is old and familiar, referring to it as a narrative, is just a new way to label it. Many psychologists and researchers have been working with "case study" techniques, but it was only in 1986 that Sarbin coined the phrase "narrative psychology".

The term, "narrative Revolution" was formulated towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Lieblich (1998), after what was referred to as the *"decline of an exclusively positivist paradigm for social science research"* (Lieblich et al., 1998:1).

Entering into a narrative inquiry relationship, as explained by Clandinin (2006), means that a negotiation process is taking place between the researcher and the subjects of the research regarding relationships, purposes, transitions and usefulness. In other words, narrative research is a joint voyage of the participant and the researcher, which aims to crystallize a theoretical framework for understanding human behaviors, while, out of respect to the uniqueness of every personal life story, avoiding as much as possible the more rigid orthodox methodologies (Josselson, in James 2012).

Although I could find obvious advantages in all of the above mentioned methodologies, it felt most appropriate to use the narrative approach, owing to the fact that a great deal of the parents' life stories in this study were revealed over the course of the relatively long process. Since narrative is fundamental to human existence, the life-stories that people choose to tell in fact organize and structure their experience, identity and understanding of their lives (Corrie & Lane, 2010). Participants in the research that were asked about their lives related the information (facts, feelings, agenda etc.) in the form of a story. Therefore, as explained by Hiles and Čermák (2007), the importance and centrality of the narrative research method, which they refer to as NOI – Narrative Oriented Inquiry .....*is more than an extension of discourse analysis: it is a field in its own right.*" It best describes the nature of the research and the means for the analysis of the materials.

## **B. The use of qualitative research in psychology**

The term qualitative research, as explained and partially demonstrated above, is an "umbrella" for different methods that share a common interest in finding meanings and interpretations that are essential to the field of psychology. As opposed to what transpires in quantitative research, where collected data is transformed and organized into numbers, statistics and deductive reasoning, qualitative data can be drawn from language, narratives, behavior and actions, and focuses on the personal experience.

Given (2008), editor of the Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods claims that:

*"Qualitative approaches have been part and parcel of psychology from its very beginnings. While marginalized and muted for about the first 80 years of the 20th century, they never completely went away. "*

Psychologists, sociologists, anthropologist, social workers, consultants and other professionals, were constantly in a search for adequate methods to capture and convey people's personal experiences. Psychologists felt that quantitative tools did not sufficiently fit their needs, when attempting to explore and conceptualize the human multilayered experience. Lavie-Adjani (2013) claims that the suitable language for psychologists is the language of "words" as opposed to the language of "numbers". She believes words better describe and represent the human processes, changes and development that occur in the course of therapy.

The process of psychological exploration opens a door to more deeply understanding experiences and viewpoints of people, which might lead to the reconstruction of more favorable new realities (Lavie-Adjani 2013). According to that, the process of quantifying data might lead to the meanings and deep layers of human perceptions, emotions, and experiences to be mistakenly regarded as shallow and superficial. Contrarily, the essence of qualitative methodologies in psychology, deals with the attempt to identify and rephrase the significance people find in their lives. As opposed to quantitative methodologies that usually deal with large populations and tries to define similarities. The role of qualitative methodology in psychology, is to focus on the unique and subjective experience of the individual. Its general and basic goals are to create a platform for the inimitable personal experience that might or might not be common with others, and to decipher multifaceted and multi-dimensional individual realities that cannot be separated. It approaches the human experience in a holistic manner, without disassembling reality into separate components (that can be quantified and measured), but rather by observing it as an important, meaningful, autonomous experience. The role of qualitative psychology in that context is to

give room to the individual voice, listen with attention and respect, and forsake the desire for generalizations in favor of a deeper understanding. Furthermore, it adopts a more inductive approach, which honors every subjective story, and only then tries to offer a way in which the personal narrative might be represented in the larger group.

The participants in qualitative research, particularly in the field of psychology, are considered partners in the research, since the research is made possible only through their willingness to share their inner worlds, minds, thoughts and feelings to the researcher. The more the researcher is exposed to different sides and experiences of an individual, the more the feeling of partnership between them grows; making the research more richer, more detailed, and knowledgeable, and consequently more significant. With the researcher listening and understanding the interpretations and meanings that participants give to their life experiences, an inter-subjective process between the researcher and the participant is formed, constructing a research reality based on a mutual interpretive discourse. Since qualitative research speaks in the language of everyday human experiences, it is much more accessible to an ordinary person i.e. there is no need for prior education in order to understand and relate to it.

To summarize, qualitative methodologies in psychology help to uncover the relevant data from the personal narrative and reflect it back in the form of useful knowledge that people can associate with.

### C. The Researcher as a Tool

Qualitative research is primarily descriptive, literal and personal, drawing its data from a subject's natural systems (Surroundings, Environment, Relationships, etc.) and context. The process takes place through "open ended" questions, informal conversations and interviews performed by a qualitative researcher.

This approach allows for the comprehension of human behaviors as the participants allow access to their private worlds. The researcher has an opportunity to "peak" into their experiences, behaviors, actions thoughts and feelings, which constitute the actual cornerstones that define their everyday reality. Shkedi explains this in his book "Words of Meaning" (2003:13):

*"this is the primary role of qualitative researchers - to help people tell their stories, to help them be aware that they are the storyteller, to help uncover their story, clarify it and present its significance to themselves and to the researcher".*

The qualitative researcher is considered to be the main research tool (Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 1990), whose role is receiving answers as presented and recorded by the subject, with respect and appreciation for the personal narrative. This kind of research emphasizes the subjective interpretation of the participant's social and cultural reality. To a large extent, the qualitative researcher gives up the scientific position of a distant objective observer, and the "all-knowing" researcher stance. In order to study and understand human behaviors, lives and experiences, we need to acknowledge the role that the participants themselves play, in our process of forming new knowledge.

## **D. Sampling**

The definition of sampling according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary is:

*“the act, process, or technique of selecting a representative part of a population for the purpose of determining parameters or characteristics of the whole population.”* (Gentles et.al, 2016).

This very general and rather strict definition is seemingly more suitable for the quantitative type of research than for the qualitative type.

As pointed out by Shlasky and Alpert (2007), the process of choosing the research population is not a random decision as used in quantitative research, on the contrary, it is a major and fundamental stage of designing a qualitative project. The research population does not strive to pose a statistical or representative sample; therefore, to an extent generalization is limited. Amongst other considerations, the criteria for choosing participants in a qualitative research include – knowledge of the researched field, ability to provide information, verbal skills, an understanding of the process and a certain level of abstract comprehension.

### **D.1. Sampling Process**

In my search of a suitable method for choosing my research participants, I found the Purposeful sampling to be the most appropriate one.

Purposeful sampling (also known as judgment, selective or subjective sampling) is a sampling technique in which the researcher's judgment is of great significance as he or she actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question.

This method is well established and frequently used in many qualitative studies, and is based on the concept of locating the participants that are most likely to help in answering the research question or achieving the research goal. Palinkas (2015:533) refers to it as the process of:

*"Selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest"*



Other researchers (Bernard, 2011; Spradley, 1979) add some more factors to knowledge and experience, such as availability, willingness to participate and the ability to coherently convey opinions, feelings and thoughts. In his well-known work, Patton (1990) presented Purposeful sampling to be the best, quickest and most economical method with regard to time and resources, when selecting "information-rich cases". He suggested that during the process of selecting cases for a qualitative study, the researcher should be sure to select participants who have rich and meaningful information to share. They are likely to be a great source for information regarding the subject being studied and should be willing to help answer the research question.

He defined 16 categories of Purposeful sampling; each one is designed to meet specific needs and goals of a particular study. Usually researchers use a combination or mixed purposeful sampling, which enables flexibility, while addressing different needs and allowing for cross-checking.

In my research, I used three of the possible variants:

- **criterion sampling** - all participants had to meet basic criteria as elaborated on p. 109
- **Typical case sampling** - participants had to demonstrate the average and typical display of the researched phenomena
- **Homogeneous sampling** – participants are a part of a particular subgroup - in this research, it refers to married heterosexual couples that are secular Jews.

## **D.2 Sample Size**

Sample size is another major issue in qualitative research. It is safe to assume that all researchers aspire for their findings to allow for a certain amount of inclusion, and not remain on the level of a unique case description; hence, sample and size are of significance.

Quantitative methods intend to achieve breadth of understanding (Patton, 2002) as opposed to Qualitative methods that are usually more interested in understanding the depth of the human experience and narrative.

In the purposeful sampling method, the number of participants is very much determined by the amount and quality of the information received from them. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend that one determine the number of participants by using the redundancy factor. This means that the sample is defined as sufficient, once nothing new or different would be achieved by adding more participants.

Miles & Huberman (1994) suggested that new participants should be added, up to the point of achieving depth of saturation.

As demonstrated by Palinkas (2015) quantitative methods emphasize the need to generalize and base the results on large samples. He explains that every research methodology draws its standards regarding to sample size, according to the research aim. A significant consideration relates to the number of meetings, interviews, or in this case – coaching sessions, held with each participant (multiple times versus once or twice). Other consideration had to do with the degree of detail required; the more detailed a study is, the smaller the sample it requires, as was the case in this research (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006; Morse & Niehaus, 2009; Padgett, 2008) in (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Although this research sample was rather small, a great deal of information was made available by the deep relationship between the participating parents and myself as the coach. It enabled me to generate insights, which I believe to be meaningful and significant for any parent. This sampling method posed a certain bias limitation, as elaborated in the section on research limitations on p. 199.

## E. Collecting and Analyzing the Data

The essence of this research lies within the comprehensive individual parental coaching process that all seven couples went through. All information, knowledge and conclusions, presented and analyzed in this study, have been gleaned from these meetings (in addition to questionnaires and open interviews).

All data was collected in two major formats - transcripts of recorded coaching sessions, interviews, and questionnaires that had mostly close-ended questions, with a range of 1-5 to choose from. After completing the coaching sessions, in-depth interviews and analysis of the two stages of questionnaires, I could discern several major themes surfacing from the data.

Theme analysis is a generic approach to data collected from the field, where the materials are analyzed in the form of principal concepts.

Holloway and Todres (2003) identified "*thematizing meanings*" as one of a few generic skills shared across qualitative analysis.

In their article – "*Using thematic analysis in psychology*" Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to thematic analysis as:

*"...a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, it also often goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic..."* (Braun & Clarke, 2006:7).

Their claim is that "theme analysis" might not be considered an explicit method, but by carefully examining other acceptable methods of analysis, it could be concluded that many qualitative methods are essentially "thematic". There are some advantages to their approach to thematic analysis, which made it a preferred method:

- It's not tied to any theoretical framework, and can therefore be used flexibly
- It provides a rich and detailed format for analyzing data
- It is accessible for "newcomers" to qualitative research

In their opinion, a theme will be considered as something important which relates to the research question, regardless of how many times it appears in the data or what its volume is. As stated:

*"Keyness" of a theme, is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures".* (Braun & Clarke, 2006:10).

It is the researcher's judgment and responsibility to decide what is considered a significant theme, since a qualitative researcher deals with the interpretation of the reality rather than with reality itself. The map of identified themes is created and influenced by the researchers' point of view, even when the process for eliciting themes is systematic, any qualitative research is influenced by the researcher's personal interpretation, position and values. Themes are identified and developed by the researcher, and eventually are formed in a way that makes it possible for the data to be reduced to key ideas. I have explored a few options for thematic analysis:

"Categorization" which is described by Shkedi (2003) as a process in which the entire data is taken out of context and out of order, divided into separate segments, and then reassembled into a new order after being conceptualized.

Another option was the "Naralizer" software, which is designed to analyze large amount of material, however I found it to be too technical and lifeless, which limits the level of profundity with which ideas can be understood and meanings discovered.

Braun and Clarke (2006) presented the option that was most appropriate to my research needs. The coding system they refer to as the "theoretical thematic analysis, fit my theoretical and analytical interest in the area as a researcher very well. This thematic method provides a detailed analysis of certain chosen aspects of the data, which is extracted from the structured coaching process (as detailed above) upon which my research is based. It enables data to be analyzed according to the specific research question, which aids in arriving at a possible to answer. In looking at the data, I could identify distinct issues that were fundamental to the coaching process, such as the process of change. Other themes recurred repeatedly in the data collected from all participants. These

were the main and shared topics the participant parents dealt with and form the essence of the process.

As the coach leading the coaching process, I had access to a great deal of information during the sessions themselves. After meeting with each couple for three or four times, I came to know them as individuals as well as parents, and became familiar with the unique personal and parental issues that they were dealing with.

Within the first few meetings with all seven couples, similar topics and major themes had already become evident. I could see the parents' common difficulties, similar attitudes, approaches and behaviors, and identified the major obstacles they encountered in their relationships with their teenage children.

With the information that I had gathered during the sessions in my research journal, I returned to the documented materials, having some thoughts and ideas, while in the course of my reading found that I was gaining further understandings and insights.

As a part of this process, I read all the materials in different variations:

1. Consecutive reading of all ten transcribed sessions of each couple
2. Horizontal reading – since all parents went through the same process, all sessions contained the same investigated issue and included the same coaching methodologies. Therefore, I found it useful to consecutively read all the first sessions in a row (and all the second ones, etc. accordingly).
3. Reading while looking for specific identified topics.

Since the major themes were identified, raised and re-discussed within the coaching sessions, I turned to materials with a few "meaning units" as described by Giorgi (2013), both from memory as well as from my research log. The conclusions were the result of my experience of and acquaintance with the participating parents and my knowledge of the researched field of coaching.

## Reading and Coding Process

		Reading and coding process					Consulting critical friend and colleges
	<b>Listening</b>  to each couple  11 voice recordings	<b>First reading:</b>  Reading each family's 11 transcripts	<b>Second reading:</b>  Horizontal reading (see above)	<b>Third reading:</b>  Targeted reading while looking for specific key words identified in previous readings	<b>Forth reading:</b>  highlighting relevant quotations according to The initial map (from research log)	<b>Fifth reading:</b>  Focusing on a few major themes (as elaborated in chapter 4)	After identifying each major theme, I presented partial results, thoughts & questions were raised
<b>Research log</b>	Entering general major themes	writing key words & major topics of each family	Identifying recurring issues in all couple transcripts	Writing a "theme map"	Making a table with copied relevant quotes	Final table divided by the 5 major chosen themes	Writing important feedback and issues that needed to be re-checked

The process of "thematizing" described above, may seem fairly simple, but it presented an unexpected difficulty. After spending a long period with each family, I came to know and appreciate each one of them within their special, holistic and unique narrative. At the beginning, I found myself reluctant to recognize the common issues and themes. It was difficult to "break" a complete and whole personal narrative into separate segments. Similarities in the parental experience started to appear after a certain amount of coaching sessions with the parents, during which I encountered similar phrases, noticed similar descriptions, and was able to distinguish subtle nuances that made the common issues visible. The major themes discussed in the next chapter emerged after completing all the coaching sessions and reading the transcripts repeatedly. All the themes presented and analyzed in this research, are as a direct result of having scrutinized the data in a vertical as well as an horizontal reading of the coaching sessions (as illustrated in the table above). The holistic personal narrative (of each parent or parental unit) is "fragmentized" in an artificial and academic manner, one that makes a global overview possible of the researched phenomenon in question. Identifying common parental issues, dilemmas and behaviors, makes room for a certain degree of generalization and induction, and enabled me to examine whether the suggested coaching processes in fact brought about the expected changes in relations with teenagers.

Being able to identify and address the common themes is vital to the academic research.

In considering how to best present the results of my research, one of the dilemmas I had, was whether to introduce each parental unit as a whole, or to focus on the common themes of all seven parental units. I feel that by choosing the thematic method, I was better able to answer the research question; however, I also recognize how this led to some loss of depth.

Since this research made use of two methods of data – questionnaires and recorded conversational transcripts, the analytic methods included the division of data according to the materials:

1. Analyzing the two phases of questionnaires (both parents and children's) was done automatically through the platform of Google forms, which analyzes frequencies of choice and ranking of specific statements for closed-ended questions. Answers given to open ended questions are quoted and embedded in the work.
2. Analyzing the recorded and transcribed ten sessions that each couple went through, in order to reveal recurring and mutual themes (see above)

#### **F. The use of questionnaires in the research**

My research was designed mainly as a piece of qualitative research, aimed to identify contemporary parenting issues in the lives of Israeli parents, offer them a comprehensive individual coaching process, and examine any changes this process might have generated. I chose to combine another kind of a tool as a supplement to the qualitative data gathered during the coaching process, added as an expanding method to the two stages of interviews conducted with the parents. In addition to supplying more information regarding stances on the parent-teenager relationship, there were two other goals: collecting data from the teenagers; identifying quantitative indications regarding change after completing the coaching process. (See **Research design** p.54)

The design process of these questionnaires was based on the following guidelines:

- Theory – based questions and statements on relevant literature from various related subject such as: adolescence (Blos 1979; Erikson 1994; Allen et. Al 2016; Gross et.al 2017), parenthood (Oryan and Gastil 2301; Dix 1991; Penic 2007; Bornstein 2012), Israeli parenthood (Lavee and Katz 2003; Rutlinger-Reiner 2013; Scharf 2014), Parent-Adolescent Relationship (Allen and land 1999; Saphir 2002; Friesen 2013).
- Logic – using common sense in matching and phrasing the questions and statements to be connected and relevant to various aspects of the researched phenomena, such as issues of trust, closeness, openness etc., between the participating parents and their teenage children.
- Preliminary exploring of the field – talking to, asking and interviewing many Israeli parents and teenagers in regard to their relationship with each other, in order to map the central and important issues they deal with.
- Using my own experience in the field of working with parents and teenagers, I conduct many parent groups making contemporary Israeli parents very accessible to me. In addition, through my work at the college and my own clinic plus the fact that I am a mother of a teenager myself, enabled me to meet many teenagers, from whom I learnt a great deal about their world and their relationship with their parents from their point of view.
- Approval of relevant specialists that can confirm that all demands are met, as elaborated on p. 74.

Using this structured and comprehensive process of defining the questions and statements to be included in the questionnaires, enabled me to examine the world of the parent teenager relationship from both sides of the equation. Some questions and statements examine the subject from a global point of view for instance - the general atmosphere in the house, and some deal with specific parts of the subject such as the time spent together (in terms of minutes). The complete questionnaires allowed for additional information (to the qualitative one) to give a fuller picture of the subject.



### Questionnaires' description

The questionnaires that examined different angles of the parent teenager relationship as elaborated on p. 72, described in the previous paragraph and detailed in the next one, were administered in two phases, the first was held prior to the coaching process, and the second was held six months after it ended, both used the Google form platform. (All questionnaires are attached in appendix 2 and 3 on p. 230, 234)

**Parents:** One set, used to collect data from parents, was sent and filled prior to commencing the coaching session; the other was sent and filed after completing the process. The first phase questionnaire contained thirty questions, 22 were close-ended questions, asking to rate certain statements on a 1-5 scale, ranging from "1 = not at all" up to "5 = to a very large extent", for example:

- *"To what extent are you tolerant to your teenager's "worlds of content"? (Music, fashion, hobbies and interests)"*
- *"To what extent does your teenager trust you?"*
- *To what extent do you consider your teenager's thoughts and opinions?*

The rest (eight of them) were open-ended questions for the parents to write freely, for example:

- *"What would you change or improve in your parenting?"* (See answers on p. 170).

To the second phase questionnaire, fifteen questions were added (four of them were open-ended) trying to identify and specify any change indications, for example:

- *"What are the main issues that have changed?"* (See parents' quotations and answers on p. 188-189).

Full parents' questionnaires are presented on appendix 2 p. 230).

**Teenagers:** The second set of questionnaires was used to collect data from the teenager's that were not an active part of the research (in the sense that they

did not actively participated in their parents' coaching sessions), and I have never met them in person.

The first phase questionnaire contained thirty questions, all close-ended questions, taking into consideration that they would be reluctant to answer a long and burdensome one, for example:

- *"To what extent do you feel your parents trust you?"*
- *"To what extent are your parents a role model for you?"*

Same method of rating statements on a 1-5 scale, ranging from "1 = not at all" up to "5 = to a very large extent", was applied.

To the second phase questionnaire, ten questions were added, (four of them were open ended), and here too, the aim was to detect any perceived changes on their part, for example:

- *"To what extent do you feel a change in your parents' behavior lately? Please give examples".* (See teenager's answers on p. 190-191).

Full teenager questionnaires are presented on appendix 3 p. 234).

### Developing the Questionnaires Process

All the questionnaires described above, were specially designed and built for this research. They were correlated to the research phenomena and question concerning the relationship between parents and their teenage children in an attempt to collect as much information as possible. The process of formulating the questionnaires comprised of a few stages.

- First draft of statements and questions to be used in the questionnaires, was written by me, based on my theoretical knowledge in the field (as elaborated on p. 71) and information gathered from the field – parents, teenagers and professionals working with parents such as - School counselors, parental coach's, parental group facilitators. I could also rely on my acquaintance, experience and knowledge in the field, the result of many years of working as a parental advisor, parental coach and parents' group facilitator.

- After formulating the first draft structure, it was sent to five specialists in the fields of parenting – two parental coaches, two school counselors and one educational psychologist. The purpose of the questionnaire was presented and explained to the specialists, and all were asked to convey their opinion as to the relevance and clarity of the statements and questions. In addition to external specialists, the draft was sent to my critical friends and colleagues and to my two dissertation supervisors. Upon receiving inputs from all, needed modifications and "fine-tuning" were made, such as - shortening the questionnaires; add open ended questions; suggestions for phrasing and wording.
- At the final stage, the dissertation's supervisors authorized the final version.

The questionnaires developing process described above, leans on what is referred to, as a "content validity" also known as the logic validity process, a well-known and used instrument.

In the world of psychology research, the process of designing a content validity tool is rather flexible and contains two main stages - preliminary studying of the field and consulting with experts, as described by Polit and Beck (2006:490)

*"There is also agreement in the methodologic literature that content validity is largely a matter of judgment, involving two distinct phases: a priori efforts by the scale developer to enhance content validity through careful conceptualization and domain analysis prior to item generation, and a posteriori efforts to evaluate the relevance of the scale's content through expert assessment..."*

The term content validity represents the need for any research measurement to be relevant, accurate and comprehensive in regard to all facets of the researched issue, as elaborated by Haynes et. al 2005.

Building these research questionnaires followed the process of content validity, hence questions and statements embedded in them, represents the researched

phenomena - different aspects of the parent teenager relationship and inputs regarding achieved change, from parents as well as the teenager's point of view.

The information obtained through these questionnaires, is embedded throughout the work in two major modes. The first is a "word to word" quotation in cases of open-ended questions. The second is in a descriptive statistics manner, (mainly simple tables that specify frequencies). Both allow an extra tool for uncovering another layer of information. Although it does not function as the major method through which data was gathered, it did provide an extra lens and an auxiliary to the main qualitative methods used in this research.

## **Part 2: Methodological Complexities**

Defining the methodology of this research was a challenge, as there were many issues that had to be dealt with, due to the complex nature of qualitative research in general and this one in particular. As a discipline, qualitative research aims to reveal concealed layers and uncover existing connections that cannot be identified through other research methodologies. Theoretical literature investigates the methodological advantages and disadvantages of qualitative research, and the sources of potential complexities and imperfections.

Early on at the stages of designing and conducting this research it raised some unique methodological concerns.

## **A. Recruiting participants**

Parents were located mainly via the platform of the internet. This method enabled addressing large populations in a fairly easy way, but it narrows down the range of the possible research sample (Wise et al., 2016), since pre-conditions are required: internet accessibility, technical skills, good verbal skills, etc. It also raised an issue concerning privacy, since it is well known that all internet interactions leave a mark, and there is a risk of a hidden third party (Curtis, 2014; Lunnay et al., 2015).

## **Small research sample**

Since the research was based on a long and time-consuming coaching process, the number of research participants was relatively small. Even though the amount of data that could be gleaned from the long process was definitely sufficient for meeting the research question, the small sample size of course affects the degree of induction to the general population that is possible. (See p. 63 regarding sampling issues).

## **B. Double role**

The major methodological and ethical issue of this research, lies in the duality I encountered by being both the researcher and the coach. Social science researchers have dealt with similar issues, e.g. anthropologists, sociologists who use participant observation methods (Kawulich, 2005). Holding the dual position of the academic researcher and the professional role of a coach is referred to as "practitioner research". No doubt, this type of research poses some complexities in addition to the qualitative issues, but one of its major contributions is that "*practitioner research, with its focus upon local inquiries is designed to address and ameliorate local problems*" (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2007:200). This dual position holds both the benefits and the shortcomings of practitioner research. It was the same rapport and close relationship that I had built with the participating parents that posed the difficulty. On the one hand, it had allowed me to enter their lives and enable them to share their feelings, thoughts and experiences with me, giving me access to real and authentic data, derived from each narrative. On the other hand, this very closeness threatened to cause potential bias, an ambiguity that I was very much aware of.

### C. Bias

As defined by Bloor & Wood (2006:21) is:

*Any influence that distorts the results of a research study. Bias may derive either from a conscious or unconscious tendency on the behalf of the researcher to collect data or interpret them in such a way as to produce erroneous conclusions that favor their own beliefs or commitments."*

It is an inherent phenomenon to any research, especially qualitative research, and in particular, when the researcher is a main tool in the research. In quantitative research, bias is considered to be a negative outcome, resulting from a methodological fault or from the researcher's ambition to find and explain data in a certain way that is consistent with the research assumptions and agenda. Bias can appear at any stage of the research - design, participant selection, research process, analysis and the writing stage (Bloor & Wood, 2006).

There are many definitions of different types of bias both in quantitative and qualitative research literature, (Bloor & Wood, 2006;) (Roulston & Shelton, 2015) ;(Norris, 1997); (Mantzoukas, 2005) amongst them, we can find:

- **Orientation bias** - This refers to the researcher predisposition in choosing the specific research topic, methodology and hypothesis.
- **Selection bias** - concerning selection issues that arise for instance during the selection of the participants, the selection of time and place, as well as the event and questions that will be posed.
- **Researcher/Experimenter bias** – This describes the situation when the researcher is affecting participants' responses and inadvertently "contaminates" the data.
- **Observation bias** - appears when researcher's stances influence the way reality is observed by him/her.
- **Confirmation bias** - occurs when data is collected and interpreted selectively to support the research hypotheses.
- **Outcome bias** - an even more radical tendency to reject data that might refute the researcher's principals and beliefs. This might lead to irrelevant explanations for justifying inconsistencies and unexpected data.

There are many more types of "bias" recognized in the world of research, some are specific, but in most research methods literature, the concept of bias is referred to as a *"source of error"* (Roulston & Shelton, 2015:334).

Other types of possible bias may occur in a broader context of the research community, e.g. when there is a governmental or other organizational involvement in requesting and financing the research, which might interfere with the researcher's autonomy. Even publication bias is recognized on the part of academic journals, when favoring the publication of specific research with the kinds of findings that pose greater news worthiness (Bloor & Wood, 2006).

Nevertheless, there has been development in comprehending the status of bias in qualitative research. These forms of "traditional" bias can be understood in the context of the "foundationalist" approach of the research world. Researchers choosing to work along the lines of the concept described by Lincoln (2011), may grasp the world of bias a

little differently:

*"new-paradigm" approaches—which take in critical, constructivist, interpretive, participatory, and post-modern paradigms—bias is not necessarily equated with "error," and the elimination of bias is not possible".*  
(in Roulston & Shelton, 2015:337)

In qualitative inquiries, bias that is often blamed on subjectivity can be referred to as *"a characteristic quality unique to a particular researcher"*. On that notion, not only is bias not considered an error that produces imbalances, on the contrary, it can *"also motivate and illuminate inquiry"* (Preissle, 2008 pp.844, in Roulston & Shelton, 2015).

When addressing qualitative research as "a dynamic meaning making process", one might assume that different results will be produced by different studies, taking into consideration the different circumstances and personalities involved, as put by Becker (1967, in Bloor & Wood, 2006:23):

*"Research is always from someone's point of view and therefore partisan".*

Norris (1997:173) relates to the qualitative researcher's position concerning possible bias and appreciates them as human:

*"Researchers are fallible. They make mistakes and get things wrong".*

He continues in noting that despite the existence of different strategies that attempt to cope with and eliminate bias of different forms, *"There is no paradigm solution to the elimination of error and bias".*

Many qualitative researchers agree on the possible ways to address bias issues:

- Awareness and acknowledgment of its existence
- Take responsibility for methodological issues that might cause bias
- Be familiar with reflexivity and subjectivity - keep in mind that the research is a part of the social world and context they explore, researchers need to acknowledge how they are affected by their own lives, values and perspectives.
- Researchers' positioning as to - gender, age, marital & parental status. Positioning is considered an important part of the qualitative work, as it conveys and explains the researcher's interpretations subjected to his or her biography, views, thoughts etc. (See p. 196)
- Other efforts for coping with possible bias, can be expanded beyond the researchers' self-criticism and control, when using "Critical friends and colleagues" (Norris, 1997) as elaborated on the next paragraph. The objective perspective of others can be very helpful in reviewing the researcher's question, style and assumptions.
- Another option is to make use of participants' validation, which would then make them an active part of the research outcomes and analysis.

### **Pleasing or response bias**

Derives from the human inclination to present a favorable persona in the research questionnaire or to give the researcher desirable answers. Due to the close relationships that developed between the participants and me, it is almost impossible to distinguish this from any true response or information given. Any cases of trying to please me would be subconscious and difficult to detect even when using



straightforward questions or inquiry. In any case, the parents were explicitly asked to put our close rapport aside in order to answer the questionnaire as objectively as possible.

### **C.1 Dealing with possible bias**

As the researcher, I tried to deal with possible bias as mentioned above, in several ways:

- All materials were documented, recorded, transcribed and open to review. Although, as mentioned before there is no doubt that my personality, agenda, values and life experience influenced the way in which I chose, conducted and analyzed the materials.
- Since I never met the teenagers in person, questionnaires were confidential; hence, all information gathered from them is more likely to be free of pleasing or any other bias.
- I have used "Critical friends and colleagues" as described by Norris (1997) in order to allow for an external view of and reflection on my work. Using the "critical friends and colleagues" model came to me quite naturally, since it is a common method of consulting in the teaching/education world. In my experience as a lecturer in the academic arena, my colleagues and I assist each other in various ways such as – sharing teaching materials, discussing teaching methods and deliberating over student-related issues. Hence, when trying to challenge my work as a coach and as a researcher, "critical friends and colleagues" was an accessible and effective method for me.

During the entire doctoral process, I had several professional colleagues who accompanied me through the various stages, giving me ongoing feedback, among them were:

- A well-known professor of social psychology with vast experience as a qualitative researcher.
- A colleague, who is also a lecturer in the field of education and a doctoral student herself, a specialist in art therapies, group facilitation and work with teenagers.

- A certified and experienced coach, who specializes in feminist work.

During the period in which I conducted the actual research, I used them in several ways:

1. Approximately once a month, I sent my research log to them, where I documented thoughts, perceptions and insights. They were invited to raise questions or make suggestions related to the materials in the log.
2. Seeking ad-hoc advice - during meaningful or confusing moments, I called one or more of my colleagues for joint contemplation.

My professional colleagues became more active once I had reached the data analysis and interpretation stage. During these months, I had almost weekly sessions with each one of them, since I wanted to consult over issues concerning the analytical process. We established an effective method of working.

- During the period of reading and re-reading the transcripts, my main task was to identify and map key words, recurring issues and main themes. At this stage, written materials where I elaborated on perceptions and findings that I had drawn from the data were sent in advance to my colleagues for reviewing.
- We would set up a meeting (these were separate meetings with each colleague) which began by presenting my findings, sharing the conclusions I had reached, and explaining the process through which I came to conclude them.
- Once the process and results were clear and understood, the colleagues were invited to present their questions, requests for clarification and any further Insights.
- Most of the meetings were dedicated to the clarification and debate over my findings as well as the interpretation of the data. In most cases, I was able to relate to their input immediately. However, in cases of doubt regarding the findings, we went back to the coaching process recordings and transcripts and re-analyzed them in order to fully validate/or revise my conclusions. In other cases, when I was unable to explain or justify my

interpretation, I would return to the participating parents (at the next session) in order to re-examine the conflicting issue.

- Once a month, I set up an appointment with a separate group of volunteering parents (who were either currently raising teenager's or had done so in the past). The meetings were held once a month, so as not to burden the parents with too many meetings. Prior to the meeting, I would send them a brief summary of the findings that I intended to discuss at that meeting. My goal was to receive an honest opinion from the parents who were familiar with "parent-teenager issues" on a personal level, in order to confirm the validity of the issues and themes I found to be central in my research.

The use of this method made room for other perspectives to be taken into account, either on an academic level or on a practical parental one. Each one of the colleagues and friends that took part in my research process, made a unique contribution that assisted me in validating and accruing the research findings and interpretations, which eventually led to answering the research question.

In the "positioning" part, (on p. 196) I invite the readers into my thoughts, assumptions, beliefs, as well as parts of my biography, which I find relevant to this work.

I financed the research on my own, using my private resources, hence, it is free of obligations or any other form of pressure from an outside source.

## C.2. Unconscious Psychological Dynamics

### C.2.1 Parallel process

Parallel process is a recognized and scrutinized term used in professions such as therapy, social work, education or coaching. In general, it refers to a certain degree of correspondence between the process that takes place between the therapist and the client, and comparable processes that take place outside the therapy room, in other parts of the client's life, accurately defined by Phillips<sup>8</sup> as:

*"The unaware replaying within the helping relationship of a pattern of relationship brought from outside".*

It also refers to the way in which issues, behaviors and sensations that take place between the therapist and the client, could be reflected and replicated inside the therapist's supervision sessions, as could be seen in Harford's review<sup>9</sup>.

Parallel processes are usually subconscious, very subtle and difficult to detect or understand, yet when the therapist becomes aware of them, it can contribute to the therapeutic process.

*"Parallel process can thereby be a source of strength as well as vulnerability"* Philips (footnote 9)

In this research, I could identify at least two parallel processes that were present in the coaching sessions with the parents:

- Coach---parent---child axle: many times, I could see how parents would bring expressions, behaviors, language, and objections into our sessions that were very similar to the ones they were describing in their relationships with their

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<sup>8</sup><https://coachingsupervisionacademy.com/coaching-supervision-and-parallel-process/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://harfordtherapy.blogspot.co.uk/2010/02/parallel-process-theoretical-review-and.html>

adolescents. For example - when asked a question that was interpreted by them as inconvenient, they would answer with a very short sentence (yes/no, I don't know, maybe etc.) while simultaneously complaining about the way their teenagers were reluctant to talk to them, share personal things with them and in general be very sparing with words. Parents described being hurt by this kind of behavior, experienced it as rude and could not understand why their children refused to answer their every question.

Since I was aware and able to recognize this process, I could use it in order to reflect this back to the parents and together analyze the various reasons for their own reluctance in answering my question. When dismantling the behavior gently, patiently without passing judgment, parents felt safe enough to acknowledge possible reasons for not answering a question, such as embarrassment, fear, guilt or shame.

*"The opportunity is that at any point individual introspection and a willingness to explore parallel process may provide significant insights"* Philips (footnote 9)

Often it was only in moments like these, after reflecting back to them that frequently their teenager's might have felt exactly like them, that the parents began to understand their teenagers from an empathetic point of view rather than reacting with anger, hurt or distance.

- Coach---parent---authority figures axle: in other cases, I could identify behaviors that are typical when addressing authority figures such as – parents, teachers or superiors at work. In a few cases, I recognized hidden objections and unwillingness to accept the observations which I made or interpretations that I suggested. Not because the parents felt that they were incorrect, but rather out of the need to contradict the content merely because it came from me as an authority figure. After analyzing and discussing the content and their motives to object, the new understanding parents gained became a powerful tool in their parenting.

Needless to say, that not every objection indicates a parallel process, it is important to be very attentive and sensitive in differentiating between them.

### C.2.2. Counter Transference

A general definition of counter transference refers to the emotional and cognitive reaction of the therapist to issues that the patient epitomizes for him/her, as stated by Murphy<sup>10</sup>:

*"The counselor's unconscious feelings that emerge as a result of working with the client"*

Similar to parallel process, this process is unconscious and evasive as well, yet very important to the therapeutic process once it becomes conscious. The term was developed as a complimentary concept to the "transference" process coined by Freud, but evolved over the years; from once perceived of as an obstacle, it became a useful tool in the process of helping the client:

*"Since the 1950s, psychoanalysts and psychodynamic therapists have held a more benign view of countertransference. It is no longer seen as an impediment to treatment (at least not inevitably), but instead as important data for the therapist to use in helping the patient". Reidbord <sup>11</sup>*

During the course of my research, which was based on the coaching sessions with the participating parents, many thoughts, questions and musings have occupied my mind. As a woman and a mother, I brought my personal and parental ethics and values into the research, which I am sure, had an impact on the way I listened, experienced and interpreted everything. I know my choice of the research topic derives from my own worlds of contents and interests, and it is impossible to fully separate between the researcher and the individual that I am.

Being a mother of a teenager myself, I could notice when information given by the parents brought up feelings and thoughts in me that were irrelevant to them. There were times when I found myself objecting to certain parental beliefs and choices on their part; moments when they reminded me of my own

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<sup>10</sup> <http://ct.counseling.org/2013/09/attending-to-countertransference/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/sacramento-street-psychiatry/201003/countertransference-overview>

parents; and instances where I recognized how inner anger and frustration were building up in the face of some behaviors that are unacceptable to me (violence). As stated before, I realize it is impossible to separate between my role as a coach and my own personality, yet thanks to my experience as a coach and group facilitator of many years, my knowledge of and experience with counter transference assisted me in being very much aware of it.

Throughout the actual coaching sessions, when returning home to write in my journal, and when re-reading and analyzing the materials, I was constantly conscious to make sure I examine my interpretation as objectively as possible. I made a conscious effort to separate myself from the participating parents, to discern between my own parental agenda and theirs, and not over-identify or be judgmental. It was a constant process of examining myself, my thoughts and my feelings, ready to boldly confront truths of myself as a person and as a mother that were revealed to me during the process. At moments where I could identify emotions and thoughts arising in me, I would turn to my colleagues for help, as suggested by Murphy (footnote 11):

*"The importance of counselors recognizing the feelings that come up when working with clients, naming those feelings and finding safe outlets to consider the implications"*

I was seeking to discuss the issues with them, ask for an outsider's perspective and find an objective process of accuracy for my work with the parents, as described by Reidbord to be the way for the researcher *"tunes the instrument"* Reidbord (footnote 12).

By doing so, I achieved two major goals, one being the unburdening of myself from aroused emotions, thoughts and reactions as specified above, the other being given the opportunity to recognize and deal with countertransference within myself during the coaching process. This way, I could reach a better understanding, experience empathy and show acceptance of the participants parental behaviors, even when they contradicted my own parental viewpoint, as suggested by Reidbord (footnote 12).

*"When countertransference is recognized and dealt with outside the counseling room, it can enhance the empathy that counselors feel for clients"*

#### **D. Collaboration**

In the world of qualitative research, there is more than one way for establishing research collaboration in order to obtain trustworthiness. Among them, we can find – control groups, critical friends and colleagues and re-validating research findings with the participants, a process referred to as "member-checking". At the design stage of the research, I have explored different options of collaborating, "member-checking" being one of them. I acknowledged the benefits of going back to my research participants to share the research findings and to give them the opportunity to evaluate and comment on it.

Given the nature of this research - long period of working with the parents, the active and central part that they played in the process and the close relationship that developed between us, allowed a deep form of collaboration to take place, as elaborated over the next pages.

Quite a few theoreticians and qualitative researchers have examined the advantages and disadvantages of "member-checking" as a collaboration form. Lincoln and Guba in their book *"naturalistic inquiry"* (1985) found it to be the most appropriate method for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research. Many others consider this method to be of a moral, ethical and methodological importance; amongst the advantages of this method, we can find (Cohen and Crabtree 2006):

- Accuracy of transcripts – allow participants to correct given data both in shape and in content – re-wording language use, deleting certain statements or adding information.
- Validate the researches' understandings and interpretation.
- Allow participants to play an active role in the course of research.
- Evaluate and promote change processes

Obviously, there are more, yet, on the other hand, there are considerable disadvantages to the same method:



- Participants can change their perceptions on the researched subject over time, which might cause the initial analyzed data to become redundant and irrelevant.
- The process of listening or reading transcripts of themselves might be offensive or difficult to bear for some participants due to poor language, their own utterances and remarks, certain personal understandings and insights that became clear through the process.
- Most participants tend **not to** listen or read research related materials. In cases which they do, it is usually in a superficial manner in order to accommodate the researcher request, so the benefit is rather small, as nicely put by Lou Harvey (2015:26):

*"My previous experience of member-checking had always been that participants would respond to any texts I sent them, if they responded at all, with broad agreement with everything I had said".*

- Many participants consider it an unnecessary burden on their part.
- Sending research materials to participants places the researcher in the upper position of an expert rather than discussing the findings face to face which relates to participants as experts of their own lives (Goldblatt et al 2011)

### **Approach applied in the present research to achieve collaboration**

As noted above, this research model summoned a unique, slightly different work with the "member-checking" method. Each coaching session revolved around a key issue, which I raised and intended to discuss. Most of the issues brought into the coaching sessions, were a part of the planned IPC model (as specified on p.112). These were general, even abstract issues (such as perception of parenthood, values, barriers or personal vision) through which I wished to work with the parents. In some cases however, there were issues that were not fully discussed in previous sessions, things that needed to be re-evaluated, or ad-hoc matters that needed clarification. Even though they were not a part of the original plan, they became one over the next sessions. On one hand, I had a coaching process layout that guided our work, but on the other hand, the

stories, personal information, uncertainties and dilemmas came from the participating parents' life in the present.

During each session, we discussed the subject in question; parents received a small assignment (an acceptable tool in a coaching process) regarding the issue that was up for discussion, such as: reflect upon, write about or examine personal behavior concerning it. The following week we re-engaged in discussing the issue, after the parents had had the opportunity to process it.

Considering the advantages and disadvantages of the classic "member-checking" method along with the profound knowledge that I had gained with my research and the participants, there were a few reasons why I chose to modify the traditional way of collaboration, so that it would suit above all, the participating parents as well as my research goal, and process:

**a.** The nature of my research was very different from researches that consists of one or two interviews per participants. This research was very intensive over a long period of time, which gave me the opportunity for extensive and deep acquaintance with my participant's lives. We were involved in a continuous spiral inquiry, which supplied plenty of occasions for validation of the issues raised during the coaching sessions. The participants were repeatedly provided with the option to review, re-think, re-examine and validate the things they had previously said with regard to a certain issue. They were encouraged to acknowledge the authenticity and sincerity of their thoughts, feelings and choice of words, and to modify whatever they felt needed modification. My understandings and interpretations were a part of the discussions along the way, as I constantly reflected them back to the parents. The aim was to allow them to take an active part in the analysis and interpretation process and also to re-check my own understandings trying to avoid bias (as elaborated on section C p. 77 that deals with bias).

The process of self-discovery that occurred throughout the coaching sessions, as well as the discussions we had over various issues, was spiral and recursive, topics that came up and were discussed in session 4 (for example), re-surfaced

in later sessions, which allowed for a great deal of collaboration in a slightly different, more natural way. In that manner, the participating parents played an active part in the outcome validation process, on a consecutive weekly basis.

In his article from 2015 "*Beyond member-checking: a dialogic approach to the research interview*" Harvey offers an alternative unique working method for the traditional member-checking process. His model is based on "face-to-face" dialog with his participants that is constructed of four phases of interviews, where each one serves as the basis for the next one, as described by him:

*"In my research procedure, rather than sending a 'final' interpretation for participants to 'member-check', each macro-stage of interpretation has been the basis of the next encounter".*

Despite the differences, I can see the similarities in Harvey's model and my own, in terms of collaboration, validation and establishing trustworthiness, not only at the final stage of the research, but rather in a continuous, personal and significant manner.

I believe that using this form of collaboration enabled both the participants and myself to benefit from an ongoing process of validating things they shared and said, and my understanding of them. This method, met the participants' need for receiving a meaningful coaching process, while allowing me to obtain significant, authentic and reliable data.

**b.** After months of closely working with the parents and coming to know them very well, the understanding that the classic "member-checking" process would not suit, became more evident. Yet, I offered them an open access to the research materials i.e. recordings, transcripts and eventually the full dissertation. I suggested it twice during our mutual work, the first time occurred towards the end of the coaching process (when all I had to offer were recordings and transcripts). Some of the parents were interested to know what I was doing with the voice recordings. I explained that they are being transcribed; they continued asking, "Are you reading all of it?" I explained that these transcripts (along with the voice recordings) are the data for my research. I felt it was the

right moment to offer them the opportunity to listen and read the materials. The second time occurred during the final interview I conducted with each couple, approximately six months after the coaching process. At that point in time, I already had a written draft of analysis containing major themes, and some interpretation and discussion, which I offered to them to read and comment. None of the parents expressed any interest in receiving and reading the material. On the contrary, they objected to the idea altogether, and were reluctant *"to have to listen to themselves all over again"*. They did express their full confidence in me, and the way in which I would present and analyze their words. They also asked me to send them a copy of the book I would write (based on the dissertation) should I ever write it.

As a researcher, I kept in mind the critical ethical obligation that I must follow and operate by, which is not causing my participants any discomfort or harm. I assumed that there were a few reasons for their reluctance to accept my offer, among them we can find:

- Unwillingness to confront once again with some of the things that they said, thought or behaved during our coaching process (e.g. – sharing incidents of outbursts, misconduct or language use, or even personal and painful insights about themselves).
- They did not want to bother with reading the materials.
- They felt safe and comfortable with my understanding and findings, especially since they took a very active part in it.

Furthermore, I felt it would be clearly un-ethical of me to try to force my research participants to do something against their will, simply because I have asked them, or was of benefit to the research. I consider it a misuse of the close relationship that we have developed during our mutual work.

It is important to bear in mind that the relationship developing in the course of such long intensive research, are dynamic, multi-dimensional and flexible. Despite the fact that I was the researcher/coach leading the process, and my role was clear and obvious, the position of a cold and distant researcher is no

longer applicable and worthy. I felt obligated to consider the parents position and wishes, hence I was willing to make some adjustments when needed, as described by Wolf (Wolf 1996). Furthermore, the fact that they rejected my offers to read the materials was a positive sign for me. That despite our close relationship, they were not trying to please me and do what I offer, merely because I asked, but rather they were loyal to what they consider appropriate for them and felt assured and confident in refusing me.

It is important to emphasize that since the research coaching process was constructed of twelve meetings, it produced **massive** amounts of material (at least 12 hours of recordings, and hundreds of transcribed pages per couple). Expecting such a task on the participants' part, would require them to multiply the time that they were willing to invest in research participation, which might have made the whole process burdensome.

Moreover, I did find an additional way to enhance collaboration that was an inherent part of the entire coaching process. As mentioned before, approximately six months after completing the coaching sessions and writing the first analysis draft, I met the parents for a final interview. It was conducted in an open manner, where the parents were asked to reflect and summarize the experience from their personal perspective. After letting each one express his or her thoughts, feelings and insights, I asked them to take a retrospective look trying to see whether their relationship with their adolescent children might have changed after the coaching session.

This final interview was an additional opportunity to review with the parents the findings and major understandings derived from the data at that time, it was the right time for sharing, collaboration and member checking, as specified in the BERA ethical guidelines from 2018:8:

*"Researchers have a responsibility to consider what the most relevant and useful ways are of informing participants about the outcomes of the research in which they were or are involved. They could consider whether and how to engage with participants at the conclusion of the research..."*

During this last interview, I presented the main and most central understandings of the research to the parents; one of them is that all research participants declared that they had witnessed an improvement in their relationship with their teenagers. Then encouraged the parents to comment and convey their thoughts and feelings. I was pleased to hear that all the participating parents verified and reinforced this finding since all of them felt a change for the better on different levels.

As explained earlier, the question whether my close relationship with the parents influenced their reports of a positive change, occupied me a great deal. I have addressed this issue in quite a few places throughout the work from different angles. For detailed reading on the subject, I refer the reader to the methodology chapter - Methodological complexities. Section B which deals with "Double role" p. 76; Section C, which deals with subject of "Bias" p. 77; Section C1 which deals with the subject of "Dealing with bias" p. 80; Section C2 which deals with "Unconscious psychological dynamics" p. 83 (mainly p. 83-85); Section A on chapter 5 which deals with "Researcher ethical reflection and positioning" P. 196.

Once again, at the final interview, I offered the parents the option of reading the draft (this time it included main themes, quotations, and partial discussion). None of them were interested; they felt that reading masses of material was an unnecessary burden on their part, and that they were satisfied with the information I had presented. I accepted their view, particularly given their active involvement throughout the process; I felt it would have been inappropriate of me to press them to undertake more than they felt comfortable doing.

- Given that this research was conducted in Israel and is deeply rooted in the Israeli culture, I have consulted a few Israeli specialists in the field of qualitative research, read other qualitative researches and realized that the method of "member-checking" is not widely used in Israel (e.g. research conducted by Prof. Wiener-levy<sup>12</sup>) although known and investigated as stated by

(Goldblatt et al 2010:389) who conducted a survey examining the issue of member check in the Israeli context:

*"Sharing qualitative research findings with participants, namely member-check, is perceived as a procedure designed to enhance study credibility and participant involvement. It is rarely used, however, and its methodological usefulness and ethical problems have been questioned".*

In addition, as stated in the new edition of the BERA (British Educational Research Association<sup>13</sup>) "ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH" 2018:1

*"Guidelines that state what action 'should' be taken may not be appropriate to all circumstances; in particular, different cultural contexts are likely to require situated judgments"*<sup>14</sup>

### **To Summarize**

Although the "member-checking" process for this research was not conducted in the traditional manner that was accepted at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a slightly modified and more adequate version was applied, in order to utilize the obvious advantages of the process. The BERA organization supports a more flexible degree of "member checking" as stated in their ethical guidelines 2018:6

*"Participants in research may be actively or passively involved in such processes as observation, experiment, auto/biographical reflection, survey or test. They may be collaborators or colleagues in the research process, or they may simply be implicated in the context in which a research project takes place"*

Moreover, in the wish to abstain misinterpretation, poor theme-analysis process, and to avoid bias as much as possible, I used the method of critical friends and colleagues as an additional tool to examine and validate the

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/resources-for-researchers>

understandings, analysis and findings of the research, making it a trustworthy one (as elaborated on p. 80).

### **E. Evidence in Qualitative Research**

In the last few decades, there has been an increase in the use of qualitative research. It has been considered a more suitable method for the exploration of human experiences, varying viewpoints, perceptions of life and existence. Yet, it is still subject to examination by quantified tools such as "evidence" which was referred to by Miller (1990) as a *"notoriously ambiguous term"*.

When discussing evidence in research, one usually speaks of the need to provide proof through the data analysis. In qualitative research, it refers to the need to demonstrate justification of the interpretation given to the collected information i.e. why and how a conclusion or a claim was made. It is an epistemological concern, as referred to by Miller and Fredericks (2003) as the *"epistemically credible"* issue.

Qualitative research is not based on the same principles that guides quantitative research, in terms of sampling, data gathering and analyzing (Shkedi, 2011); that is why it is difficult to apply the quantified terms of validity, credibility and generalization to it. Lincoln and Guba (1985) offered the term *"trustworthiness"* as a more suitable alternative to the quantified validity, since qualitative research aims to explore different interpretations of reality, rather than discover or define it. The meaning of qualitative research is to provide a convincing description of a unique piece of reality, which offers logical connections between its various components (Shkedi, 2003). Some techniques were offered in order to allow credibility in qualitative research; amongst them, we can find data accessibility, rich descriptions from the studied field, triangulation or cross-checking of data sources (Shlasky & Alpert, 2007; Shkedi, 2003).

In this research, several methods were applied in order to assure trustworthiness, and provide evidence of the findings:

- All materials were saved and available for review.



- Presented Interpretations and results contained rich descriptions quoted from what parents actually said during the sessions. Explanations, perceptions or conclusions on my part originated from the things I heard, saw and understood directly from the participating parents, which I considered to be the most compelling evidence in my research.
- Different angles of the researched issue were possible for a few reasons - the long period of work with the parents and the spiral nature of the work, which meant discussing major issues more than once, at different points in time. The fact that the concluding interview was conducted six months after completing the coaching process; hence, the participating parents had already distanced themselves from the process and were able to retrospectively relate.
- Data was gathered from different sources (parents and teenagers).
- An identical coaching process was used to obtain data from different people.
- As described previously, the two stages of questionnaires filled before and after the coaching sessions both by parents and by the teenagers, offered another layer of information that enriches the research outcomes.

Shkedi (2011) points out that the term "generalization" in the qualitative context somewhat contradicts the qualitative view that a studied phenomenon is unique. The relevant question is whether a specific study can represent others in terms of people, populations and societies. I believe that this research is applicable to parents in different contexts, given the necessary adaptations.

In conclusion, the perception of "evidence" in my research relies heavily on the possibility to connect my insights to the stories, thoughts, dilemmas and descriptions that I have received from the participating parents. All this while keeping in mind that they are at the center of my study, and it was their life stories that informed my data.

However, with all this said I still acknowledge the inevitable fact that the "evidence" in this context is subjective, partial and can be defined in more than one way.

## **F. Irrelevant issues**

The coaching process all parents went through focused on them as individuals and as parents. Despite the focal point, comprehensive coaching process raises the opportunity to meet other sensitive and repressed personal issues, such as marital tension, professional dissatisfaction or disappointment with oneself. In order to allow participants to feel heard and contained, some issues that were considered relevant and influential to the research purpose, were opened and discussed, while others were left out. This required me to be very attentive and sensitive in order to conduct the coaching sessions with care, while very accurately raising the questions, and isolating non-relevant issues, thereby allowing trusting relationships and openness to develop, without being drawn into irrelevant issues.

## **G. "Personal Narrative – more than words"**

Meeting with people face to face, exposed me as a person, as a researcher and as a coach, to many layers of the human discourse. It was not only words that I heard. The personal narrative was revealed to me in many subtle ways - the posture of the body, the unique body language, the movements of the hands, etc. I found myself paying close attention to the participants' facial expressions, smiles, tears and sadness, feeling the excitement and anticipation in the air, listening carefully to the intonation in their voices, pauses between the spoken words, words that were emphasized, and those that were spoken hesitantly or not at all. The human language is rich and expressive and conveys the most delicate nuances in far more ways than through words. Many things were said and understood without saying a word, just by using certain gestures that are familiar to all. These qualities could get lost in certain circumstances: first, when transforming into audio recordings, next when becoming a written text, and lastly when being translated into a different language. There is a great deal of information that gets lost in the process of turning the rich and colorful experience of listening and talking in person, into flat textual materials, especially when taking quotations out of context from the full conversation and

out of cultural and lingual context. I am grateful for having been a part of the coaching sessions and for not having to rely merely on written text, I believe it enabled me to fully understand the process that we went through.

### **Part 3: Ethics**

#### **Introduction**

The issue of ethical complexities is inherent to the world of research in general. Qualitative research poses some additional questions that should be taken into consideration, some relate to general ethical issues that lie within the design of any research, and some are unique as described in "The centrality of ethics in qualitative research" (Traianou, 2014). Many researchers address the ethical issues in qualitative research in general and in the field of therapeutic professions in particular (Corrie & Lane, 2015; Thompson & Russo, 2012). The goal of the therapeutic professions in general, is to witness a change for the better in the patient/client/coachee, whereas the main goal of any research is the advancement of knowledge. This might cause an internal complication due to the nature of the relationships developing between the two sides of the equation. Such research places a lot of responsibility on the researcher who is required to be attentive, sensitive and flexible (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008).

The profession of coaching (similar to other "helping others" professions) deals with specific and relevant ethical issues. Hence, the European mentoring and coaching council issued a 'Global Code of Ethics for Coaches and Mentors' that relates to most of the pertinent issues.<sup>15</sup>

This specific study raised quite a few ethical matters, which I had to address prior to engaging in my research, as well as in the course of and upon completing the research, analyzing the data and dealing with outcomes.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.emccouncil.org/quality/ethics/>

## A. General and common issues

The following issues are considered to be overall ethical issues, recognized and known as described in the "Qualitative research in clinical and health psychology" (Rohleder & Lyons, 2014).

Informed consent - Derives from the basic assumption that participants should give their consent to willingly participate in the research process. Any given consent that the participant and researcher agree upon, must be knowledge based. In order to meet this demand, some preliminary conditions should be met:

- One must offer detailed **information** regarding the research process, procedure and purpose. In order to minimize bias, the participants received information regarding the general subject of the research. They were told that it deals with parent-child relationships. I explained the reason for not elaborating on the exact purpose of the research, promising that in the last session, it would be revealed and explained. All participants fully understood the logic of it, and willingly agreed.
- Indeed, in the last session the participants received a full description and explanation of the research goal, rationale and question. In any case, throughout the entire research process, I made sure participating parents would be informed regarding the process.
- Be **familiar** with the process - fully understand the requirements, setting and methods of the research. To ensure this point, participants were led through explanations and guidelines regarding the logistical issues involved, session attendance and practicalities of the research (e.g. recording of the sessions). All requirements of the research stages (of both parents and teenagers) were fully presented and explained to the participants and were also specified in the agreement which the parents were asked to sign prior to starting the coaching process.
- Possible **gain and loss** – Even though the sessions were free of charge, there was still a clear loss in terms of time and money (e.g. travelling

expenses). In terms of gain, nothing was promised in advance, but most people are familiar with the possible positive impact of any coaching process, hence, the parents entered the study believing it would prove to be worthwhile for them. I had to remain mindful of that belief.

- The right to **end participation** at any moment. The option to withdraw from the coaching or the research was made clear from the very first interaction, yet no participant chose to withdraw. All participants were assured that in case they decided to withdraw, all materials produced from sessions and interviews with them would not be used.
- **Anonymity** – Since it was a rather small research group, and part of the written outcomes will include quotations, it might be fairly easy to recognize the subjects, despite the fact that all references are anonymous. The issue was discussed in detail with the participants explaining the difficulty. Part of the agreement that was signed, included a specific permission to be quoted, recognizing the risk of being identified. It was also notified that the researcher was planning to publish the dissertation and the outcomes in a Hebrew book, making way for yet another opportunity for the surrounding acquaintances, friends and family of the participants to recognize them. Despite all measures taken none of the participating parents had any problem with that, and it was addressed both initially and at the end of the process plus will be revisited again prior to final publication in a book.
- **Confidentiality** - All materials (recordings, letters, questionnaires, transcripts) are closed for research purposes only.
- **Risks** – Starting any coaching or counseling process involves the risk of issues emerging that arouse some troubling questions. The option to withdraw or to facilitate a referral to another psychologist or counselor was raised and was open as a possibility.
- **Legal consents** of adolescents under 18 to participate in the research - All parents are adults and are therefore legal guardians of their children, so they can allow the teenagers to participate. The teenagers received information from their parents regarding the process that they would be

going through. Most parents chose to give their teenagers vague information saying they have volunteered to participate in research dealing with parenthood in general and were reluctant to give unnecessary details. It was explained to the teenagers (by their parents) that part of the research contained two stages of questionnaires that they would be asked to fill out. They were assured that the parents had no option to see or know their answers. All teenagers agreed to participate, received a link via mail and completed the questionnaires.

## **B. Ethical Safeguards**

When entering the stage of choosing my research participants, I had to make some considerations before including them, in addition to the process and criteria presented on p 110.

The NSPCC research ethics committee published a manual, which specified a few central guidelines for conducting ethical research<sup>16</sup>, which I made sure to follow. It was important for me to make sure that none of the participants would be in a position of suffering any harm as a result of their participation in the coaching process, as explained on the NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children guidelines (footnote 16):

*"In order to assess the risk of participants becoming distressed and the risk that the distress results in harm, researchers will need to consider how vulnerable participants are likely to be..."*

In order to ensure that, I insisted on a long and thorough preliminary interview, where we had plenty of time to become acquainted with one another. During that meeting, I was very attentive to the things the candidate parents chose to disclose about themselves, particularly the place and role each one of them took

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/services-and-resources/impact-evidence-evaluation-child-protection/conducting-safe-and-ethical-research/>

and the obvious marital relationship that was unconsciously exposed in the course of the conversation. It was of great importance to me to make sure (as much as possible) that the participants were strong and resilient, and would benefit from the coaching process, even at the risk of encountering some unpleasant personal truths. Despite any embarrassment or inconvenience, I specifically asked direct questions with regard to emotional difficulties, such as prior psychological treatment, use of related medication (such as SSRI) or any other mental instabilities, in an attempt at minimizing any tension or problem that might arise in the future.

As a result of this careful preliminary process, there were a few couples that originally wished to join, but eventually did not participate in the research, due to issues such as – prominent difficulties in their marital relations, evident difficulties in discussing personal and emotional related issues, or the tendency towards anxiety attacks. Since I did not know these people prior to them asking to join the research, I did not think it was my place to impose any advice or bluntly recommend they go to therapy. In these cases, I gently asked if they wished to receive my recommendations of therapists who specialize in treating people with similar issues. After conducting this screening process, I chose seven families to participate in my research. Two major considerations guided me – the belief that the chosen couples were in an adequate emotional state and would benefit the most from the coaching process. The second was, making sure that all of them met the relevant criteria and would be effective in providing pertinent data regarding the research question. Due to the fact that the actual coaching process was quite long (over half a year) as expected, it exposed some "soft spots" either in their personal lives or in their marriages.

In one case, when discussing the issue of values, an unpleasant and loud fight erupted between one of the couples, with them trying to involve me into the fight, encouraging me to pick sides, and unconsciously wishing for me to take on the role of a marriage counselor. There was no point in continuing the session as planned, therefore I stopped the conversation, explained that I do not hold the position of marital coach, and do not intend to enter what was obviously a



private fight. I proposed that they took a week off, reflected and discussed their personal and marital matters, and decide if it was possible and convenient for them to continue the coaching process. They returned to me a few days later, requesting to proceed with our process, which was free of marital tension from that moment on. In our last meeting that took place at the final interview, six months after finishing the coaching process, they asked me to recommend a marriage counselor for them. The incident did not take me by surprise, since I had considered in advance the eventuality of encountering unpleasant and personal difficulties in the course of the research, as stated in the NSPCC guidelines (footnote 14):

*"Therefore, the possibility of someone becoming upset or the fact of a participant actually becoming upset does not necessarily mean the research should not go ahead or should stop, as long as the participant is clear that they wish to continue and the situation is handled sensitively and appropriate support is in place"*

In another case, which occurred recently (over a year after we finished our coaching meetings) one of the fathers asked if I would be willing to be his personal coach. Due to logistical issues, it was not possible; however, I referred him to a colleague.

During the many years of working in the "helping others" profession fields, I have established good professional relations with certified psychologists, clinical social workers, marital counselors and educational advisors, to whom I can refer my coachees when in need, hence I was confident that I had good professional backup if needed.

In this context, it is important to emphasize that long after completing the coaching process, I remained accessible to the participating parents when they felt the need to consult in cases of dilemmas, wished to share an experience, or simply wanted to talk to me. In the course of the year and a half since I have finished my research, I have received quite a few calls from many of them, related to various issues i.e. incidents with the children, looking for advice or just wishing to share a happy occasion.

Regarding the teenagers, despite the fact that they did not take an active part in the process i.e. were indirect participants, I did consider them a part of the research, and took some measures in advance.

As explained earlier, in Israel parents are considered to be the legal guardians of their children until the age of 18, so I needed to accept two kinds of consents – the teenagers themselves needed to express their willingness to participate in the process of completing questionnaires<sup>17</sup>:

*"Researchers need to ascertain whether the children themselves have been consulted about their involvement" (footnote 16).*

The other type of consent was the parents' legal one, as explained on p. 101.

Since I did not have any planned meetings with the teenagers and could not form an impression with regard to them, I asked the parents as their gatekeepers to give me a short description of their children, especially informing me of any unique problems. Apart from a few children using Ritalin due to ADD, or having some common difficulties in school, none of the teenagers had any mental or emotional issues, according to the parents. Given the fact that the parents are considered to be the legal guardians of their children, I had to trust the information given by them. However, I did add an additional safeguard by agreeing with them that I could refer to relevant safeguarding authorities if needed (especially in cases of a suspicion of any type of harm to the children). The participating parents and I discussed the eventuality of a possible dilemma arising or difficulties regarding the children. We agreed that if necessary, I would turn to the relevant case manager (teacher, school counselor etc.) in order to receive as much information as possible, making it possible to deal with it within the coaching process. Fortunately, none of the above occurred during the process of the research.

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<sup>17</sup> [https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\\_fs/1.165641!/file/SREGP-Children-Young-People.pdf](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.165641!/file/SREGP-Children-Young-People.pdf)

## **Part 4: Research Procedure**

### **Research procedure**



### **A. Process Description**

#### **I. Advertising and recruiting**

A short pamphlet describing the research was published on various social networks, local papers, personal and professional mailing lists. It invited couples to join the research study and to receive the opportunity to experience an individual parental coaching process free of charge, providing that they met the requirements. All applicants received a call, during which questions were answered briefly and a date was set for the first meeting.

#### **II. First meeting and interview**

The purpose of this session was to be acquainted with the applicants.

After screening potential candidates during the initial call, the selected participants, who were interested in the research, were invited to a preliminary meeting to ensure their match and commitment to the process. I presented myself and received some initial information on the parents and their families. The parents were informed of the purpose of the study, which was carefully described to them during the meeting. It was a short explanation regarding the goal of the research. Explanations of the process, research requirements and mutual expectations were laid out before them.

Ethical issues such as anonymity and confidentiality were discussed, and the parents signed a consent agreement for their participation in the research and

the coaching sessions.

### **III - Pre-coaching questionnaires**

Questionnaires that were built for this study were distributed separately to the parents and adolescents. They were designed to examine attitudes regarding relationships, atmosphere and communication between the parent and the adolescent child.

The adolescent's questionnaire was made up of "check box" type questions, taking into consideration the fact that we are dealing with an age group that might have little patience for filling out questionnaires. The parents group received a more demanding questionnaire, which included some "open ended" questions, in order to allow them to express their points of view. See details on p. 72

### **IIII – The coaching process**

At the heart of the process were the ten coaching sessions, (each one lasting one full hour) with both parents attending all sessions. During the sessions, various coaching techniques were applied. Occasionally the parents received assignments to think and write about at home. The participants were expected to describe important and significant moments within the process - both positive and negative ones. The manner of capturing and describing these moments was left up to the parents, which resulted in receiving WhatsApp messages, photos, phone calls, text messages, emails, short videos, vocal recording, etc.

### **V – The second Questionnaire**

After completing all ten coaching sessions, and a subsequent waiting period of nearly five months, new links were sent out for the second round of questions. A few new questions were blended into those from the first questionnaire, in an attempt to discern of any prominent changes and differences regarding the parent child communication, which might have resulted from the coaching process.

## **VI – In-depth interviews with the parents**

After a few months of allowing the families to experience the possible effects of the coaching sessions, a date for the final meeting was set. An open-ended interview was conducted, to enable the researcher to understand the participating parents' opinions and evaluations of the process that they had experienced.

### **B. Research Tools**

Several tools were used during the research period that lasted a total of approximately 8 months.

**Introduction interviews** – all applicants were invited to a preliminary interview which served the following purposes:

1. Acquaintance conversation to test compatibility on both sides (Some of the applicants did not enter the research).
  2. Presentation of the research procedure (as elaborated in the ethics chapter).
  3. Discussion regarding their motivation for entering the research.
  4. Emphasis of ethical issues, such as: informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality and voluntary participation.
- Every couple participated in ten coaching sessions, during which different exercises and activities were used. The sessions were held on a regular basis (once a week on the same day, hour and location).
  - Questionnaires were answered twice during the process, both by the parents and adolescents. All questionnaires were sent by mail via Google docs.
  - Final interviews were held after a period of approximately five months.

### **C. Research Population**

Seven families (seven couples, fourteen individuals) participated in this research – each family consisted of a heterosexual married couple (mother + father) who lived together and had at least one teenager between the ages of 13-18 years, who lived in the family home on a regular basis.

The research population was not easily located; it took a few cycles of advertising in various social media networks, local newspapers, central billboards, and personal and professional mailing lists. Since the process was given free of charge, I had expected a large amount of applications for participation in research, as in exchange they would receive a thorough parental coaching process. The only way I can explain the reluctance to participate, is that it may derive from the fear of being judged, of facing embracing truths, and possibly the foreboding of a conclusion in which change might be necessary (as elaborated in the section regarding change related emotions, (p. 176).

The population participating in the study consisted of both parents and their adolescent, although the parents were in fact the primary research population which I worked with. The teenagers formed the secondary and indirect population. Although I did not meet them, they were an important part of the research, since they took on an active role in the two stage questionnaires.

The families were as diverse as possible (given the small sample), differing in characteristics such as the age of both parents and children, their country of origin, occupation and education, as well as the cities and neighborhoods that they lived in and the total number of children in the family.

#### **C.1.1 Main Characteristics**

- All families were comprised of married couples living together with their children.
- The parents ranged in ages between 37 – 51 years.
- All parents were working at least part time. Some were self-employed.
- All families lived in private homes - middle-class socioeconomic status was quite similar.
- Fifty percent of the parents had academic education; the rest had a high school education.
- Most families had more than one teenager living at home; each family had at least two children (teenager's and others).
- All families were considered secular in the sense that they did not practice a religious life style, although all families defined themselves as "traditional Jews".

### **C.1.2 Criteria for Locating and Selecting Participants**

- Ability to speak fluent Hebrew
- Willingness to commit to a long process
- Technical and emotional availability
- A certain level of Self-awareness and psychological aptitude
- Ready to be open and honest regarding one's inner world
- Emotional health and resilience
- Readiness to meet less flattering sides of oneself.

### **C.1.3 Short Overview of the Participating Parents**

[Ed and Mo - in their late 30's; they have three boys (13.5, 12, 9). They work together in their own business in the marketing and printing field; both have high-school educations. Ed lost her older brother in a terror attack at the age of 16, an event that she described as life changing.]

[Ar and Mi - in their mid-40's; they have three children, 2 daughters and a son (19,16,13). Both have demanding careers, Ar is a highly ranked officer in the army, Mi is in the field of Human resources. Mi lost her mother at a very young age (10) and from that moment on, she felt detached, 'drifting in the world with no anchor'. According to her, her main goal was to build a home for herself and have children to raise and take care of, contrary to her experience of abandonment in childhood.]

[Si and Hez - in their early-50's; they have three children 2 sons and a daughter (19,16,14). Hez owns a store, in which he works by himself, resulting in him leaving home at eight in the morning and returning back at eight in the evening. Si is an elementary school teacher. Hez comes from an immigrant family and came to Israel at the age of three. Si comes from a big family and is the youngest of 11 siblings.]

[Avz and Etz - in their mid-40's; they have three children, 2 daughters and a son (16,13,6). Both have an academic educations and demanding careers, Avz

works in the hi-tech industry. Etz is in the field of finance, and both work very long hours.]

[Edu and li - in their early 40's; they have three children (16, 13, 5) two sons and a daughter. Both have a high-school education. Edu comes from an immigrant family and came to Israel at the age of twelve. He works in newspaper marketing. Li comes from a big family and works as a medical secretary.]

[Of and Na - in their early-50's; they have two sons (17,15). Of is working as a computer technician. Na is in the Human resources field, both are working for the same organizations for decades. Both have an academic education.]

[Je and Eti - in their mid-50's; they have two daughters (17,16). Both have taken early retirement. Eti retired from being a police officer, while Je retired from the army. Eti chose not to work but rather invest in studying things of interest to her. Je started a business recently. Eti has an academic education; Je has a high school diploma.]



#### **D. Coaching Session Content**

All coaching meetings were held in a quiet private room, either in my own coaching clinic, or at a rented facility that bestowed the atmosphere, privacy and convenience needed for such a process.

- **Pre-coaching session:** Mutual "getting to know you" Meeting
- **First Session:** A "snapshot" of my life
- **Second Session:** Parents as Adults - remembering our adolescent years
- **Third Session:** Personal image of myself as a parent
- **Fourth Session:** Personal Values
- **Fifth Session:** Defining the core values and their reflection on personal and parental boundaries
- **Sixth Session:** Personal Barriers - discovering the things that hold us back
- **Seventh Session:** Personal resources, special abilities and skills
- **Eight Session:** My parental Toolkit
- **Ninth Session:** Renewed personal and parental Vision
- **Tenth Session:** Summary and significant insights derived from the process, Closing and Farewell

There was reason and logic to the content and order of the sessions as presented above. As a coach who believes and practices coaching psychology, a set of values underpin my work. I truly and deeply believe that each person is an "expert" of his or her own lives. I do not assume that I have all the knowledge and solutions; I do not judge or impose my way of thinking. My goal is to help parents in the process of being familiar with themselves as people, finding their own unique voice and creating a way of life that suits their values and priorities in order to help them in their parenting. The full description of each coaching session is elaborated on in the meetings plan, see **appendix no.1** p. 219

## E. Glossary

- a. **Change** - The concept of change was not defined by me but rather by the participants. The issue of change regarding relations with teenagers was addressed a few times throughout the research process. The first time was at the first coaching session when parents were asked if and how they have changed due to parenthood in general. In the third coaching session we discussed the concept of parenthood, how the parents perceived their own parenthood, at which point they were asked if they would like to change something in their parental behaviors.

The next time the issue of change came up was during the tenth session, which was the last. Parents were asked to retrospectively examine the process, and to try to see if their personal or parental behaviors had changed.

- b. The definition of **adolescent** in this research – ages 13 to 18
- c. **Parental unit** – both parents (heterosexual) that live in the same house and raise children together
- d. **Coaching** – see definition and detailed information on p.44
- e. **Coaching psychology** - see definition and detailed information on p.47
- f. **Sampling** – the process of selecting a relevant part of a given population for the purpose of research
- g. **Israeli Parenthood** – see p. 34

## **Chapter 4 - Results and Discussion**

### **Introduction**

This chapter portrays the major themes that came up during the data analysis of the information gathered throughout the coaching sessions, questionnaires and interviews.

Each theme is presented as an independent unit, since each one presents a unique and distinct part of the entire process; it involves unmatched issues and raises specific questions relevant to the presented topic; and each individual theme is of interest independently from the other. For easier and sequential reading, each theme includes quotations and the parts of the discussion that are relevant to the described theme. The referral to research contributions, limitations and pointers towards possible future research in the field, constitutes an integral part of the research outcomes, and are all specified in the following chapter.

### **Identifying an array of major themes derived from coaching sessions**

The developing and maturing process of self-awareness that occurs with both parents as individuals and as parents (mother and father), constitutes the cornerstone of the study and the parental coaching process that all participants went through. The main tool for analyzing the major themes that evolved out of the work processes was supported by the personal narratives of each parent as a person and of each couple as family leaders. Issues such as - identifying the change processes; improvement in parental ability to achieve better communication with their adolescents; change in the overall family atmosphere and sense of partnership and belonging, revealed themselves to me during the weekly sessions. The "Personal story" which was the focus of this study, is the most significant component. Through this narrative it became possible to discern the way in which the recognition and understanding of self-perception (each parent to him/herself), of family relationships and dynamics, and of adolescent characteristics and needs, design and affect the ability to make a difference in beliefs, behaviors and discourse. This entire range of heightened

awareness and understanding ultimately lead to a substantial improvement in the quality of communication patterns between the parents and teenagers. After completing all ten sessions and the final interview with the seven participating couples, the session recordings were transcribed, thus enabling me to engage in their analysis. I read the transcripts repeatedly, in my attempt to discern prominent recurring themes that seem relevant to the research question, as described in the methodology chapter, section F (Collecting and analyzing the data p. 66).

As argued on (p. 80) in the section dealing with bias, and stated by Becker (1967, in Bloor & Wood, 2006:23) "Research is always from someone's point of view and therefore partisan".

The themes presented in this chapter, are the ones I, as the researcher found to be central, important and significant. It is of course possible that other researchers reviewing the same materials might find different themes to be more significant; all are valid, important and true.

## **A. First theme - Parental and Personal Paradigm**

### **Introduction**

The working assumption of this research project is that there are fundamental guiding principles latent in every parent in the form of a primal, spontaneous and intuitive parental compass. This inner compass is based on the following: a person's previous experiences as a child subject to parental modeling in his or her parents' home; the individual's dreams and aspirations as a parent and the parent's innate, central value system as a human being, even before he or she became a parent. Human beings differ from one another in their levels of self-awareness; some examine themselves constantly, probe the reasons and motives for their own behaviors, and are aware of the core of their being. Other individuals may live most of their lives on "automatic pilot"; they abstain from, and even avoid, encountering parts of their inner selves. The majority can be found somewhere in between these two extremes.

My motivation for conducting the study came from my understanding of the challenge of parenting, which relies on many years of working with parents. It is preferable for each person to connect to his or her inner self, prior to checking how the “parental suit” fits. I believe that parents need to be willing to deal with complex and even uncomfortable truths about themselves during the process of creating the deep and authentic connection to their inner selves. Only then, can there be room for broader discussion, which includes the adolescent child's world, and wrestles with questions about the relationship that develops in the ‘space’ between two people (parent and child). The next question that can then be addressed is how; if at all, their parenting skills and connection with their children can be improved.

### **A.1. Values**

Values are the “road map” by which people manage themselves, their relationships and their interactions with others – partnerships, parenting, family and friendships. People like to think of themselves as virtuous, good human beings, who do the right things and make the right choices.

The majority perceive of themselves as recognizing, understanding, and aware of the central values that guide their lives as individuals, partners and parents. What is that “value”, the primary basic unit that gives most of us direction in life?

According to the "Encyclopedia of Identity" (Jackson II & Hogg, 2010:856) values are described as:

*"... Our important and fundamental beliefs about what we consider to be good or right .... Values are broader life-orienting principles".*

Other definitions of the term:

**Cambridge dictionary:**

*"The beliefs people have, especially about what is right and wrong and what is most important in life, that control their behavior: family/moral/traditional values" (British version)<sup>18</sup>*

**Oxford dictionary:**

*"Principles or standards of behavior; one's judgment of what is important in life." <sup>19</sup>*

According to the above definitions, it is clear that “values” as they are perceived and understood by most human beings as the building blocks that shape their personality and character. Values are viewed as the basic, fundamental materials on which human beings base their worldviews, choices, behavior and whereabouts in the world.

The value scale that individuals adopt, are acquired in an ongoing, life-long process of observation, imitation, learning and socialization. To a large extent, this process forms the individual’s personality and the way in which he (or she) will live their adult life in the future. Prof. Y. Leibowitz, one of the greatest Jewish philosophers of the twentieth century, expressed this worldview when he said:

*“Value is something a person chooses for himself, in order to determine his actions and live his life accordingly, because he believes that it is good.”*

The core-value issue is a key part of all coaching models; therefore, we began addressing this issue in the fourth coaching session with the parents, when we started mapping their world values. At first, we did this individually for each parent, and then husbands and wives as a complete entity were asked to jointly choose their most important values as parents and as leaders of the family unit. (Not more than ten values per family, which I called the “Ten commandments”).

The values-selection process was not simple at all. Parents were presented with special therapeutic cards; each one had a value title as well as a brief description

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<sup>18</sup> <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/value>

<sup>19</sup> <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/value>

of the traits/behaviors it represented. (Following the model presented in Prof. Dolan's book: "Coaching by Values", 2011).

Parents were instructed to select realistic values that represented them as human beings living and operating in the real world, as opposed to idealistic, theoretical and lofty values that they might aspire to. They were checking the variety of suggested values for a while and it was clear that they were having difficulty choosing "only" ten personal values from the total array.

Most parents collected more and more value cards, while passionately claiming that each one is essential, and represented their core values as human beings. All of them agreed that the process of having to choose only ten values was very difficult, and some of them would even try to negotiate:

**Ed:** *It's hard to choose...it's not easy*

**Mo:** *May we pick more than ten?*

In a slow process of focusing on details and of careful examination of each value card, the parents reluctantly gave up the rest of the cards and remained with ten cards each, claiming them to be precisely those that indeed reflected the real core values of themselves as people.

After each parent had ten value cards, we went over each value card and tried to clarify the essence of those specific values in their eyes, why was it ranked as important? where was each value encountered in everyday life.

**Ar:** *"wait a minute, there are so many values, and each one you choose, means you have to...."*

**Mi:** *"wait... I need a second... you said core values, so I'm starting to be honest with myself"*

The selected values by most parents were not surprising. These were considered universal values, recognized in most of Western society as representing human ideals to which most of us wish to live and behave by.

### **A.1.1 Selected values**

The total selected values were divided into six categories, which included close values:

**Proper attitude toward others** – respect, justice, trust, loyalty, integrity, decency, honesty – 28 entries

**Emotional intelligence** – sensitivity, openness, empathy, compassion, support, forgiveness, acquiescence, flexibility, patience, calmness, positivity - 29 entries

**Relations with others** – cooperation, contribution to society, communication, friendship, environmental care, generosity, optimism, familyism, maintaining tradition, equality – 28 entries

**Ability to love and enjoy** – love, touch, cherish, joy, fun, freedom – 20 entries

**Leading ability** – leadership, innovation, self-control, creativity, initiative, perseverance, independence, self-esteem, diligence, practicality, safety, health - 26 entries

**Organizational ability** – order, planning, simplifying, handling of money and property, accuracy, economic independence — 26 entries

Execution of selected values – the list displays clear, defined and ideal values, and it is easy to understand what behavioral and pragmatic conduct derives from them.

In principle, it would be safe to assume that if a person embraces any value and considers it important and essential to them, they would take action accordingly. This expectation of course holds true regarding values concerning raising children as well. In reality, things were a little different.

After parents chose the values perceived as the core values of existence and educational agenda's, we checked and discussed each of the selected values, examining how they might be manifested in reality.



### **A.1.2 Prominent chosen values**

Following are some of the prominent values that were disclosed in most of the dialogues with the parents. I will also present the discourse around these values, and the changes that occurred after the parental coaching.

#### **A.1.2.1 - "familyism"**

All parents, whether individually or as a couple, selected the value "familyism" as one of the main values that give direction to their lives, if not the most important one. A big part of the discourse revolved around the concept of family, what it represents for us, what it includes, where we learned about family, and so on.

Following are quotes from the discussion on the topic of "family", which highlight the importance of family in the eyes of parents. One such example can be found in the story Si, in her description of her son coming up the stairs:

*Si: "... When I started parenting my first child, few things were clear to me. All this time I wanted the family I've had (...) exactly. Like on Friday eve (Shabbat eve), holidays when you're meeting your family and being together. That was important to me and I still long for these things today because they matter to me (...) the memories that chased me from my mother and the home I grew up in, it's the smell and flavors and the atmosphere as well. My son comes and says I knew... it is your smell ... from downstairs he is telling me your scent is all over the building. It's important to me because that's what follows him for the rest of his life... So what they'll remember me for is not pictures from abroad, they will remember the smells and flavors ... and that's something that followed me all my life and I'm still going with it. To serve the hot meal, he should have that, if he wants it or not later – that's for him to choose.*

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**Interviewer:** Family, why? Is family a high value for you?

**Ar:** yes, absolutely, family life

**Interviewer:** your own nuclear family or the extended family?

**Ar:** first, the nuclear family, but the extended family is also important, but first and foremost, if you said "core family" ...so...the small family

**Interviewer :** Family?

**Mi:** *that comes first*

**Interviewer :** *What about family is so important to you?*

**Mi:** *because I didn't have one. I am still stuck (...) It's the most important thing for me (...) When I introduce myself, I say that I started my life after the military service. First of all, it was important for me to start a family, and to take care of them and raise my children and be with them and to be there for them and after that I started to learn and develop myself.*

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**Edu:** *This is the family that matters ... high value to me. . Especially, first my mini core family, my husband and my children. I will do whatever and how much it takes... it's a virtue ... for them.*

All these quotes express the importance of the family in the parents' lives. For the most part, families, especially children, are the most important thing in their lives. In Israel, which is considered a family and children-oriented society (Lavee & Katz, 2003; Rutlinger-Reiner, 2013) these kinds of statements are regarded as natural and ordinary, even expected. Since all parents without exception, claimed that family and children are the top priority of their lives, one would expect them to spend time with their children, share mutual content worlds and interests with them, and generally try to establish a space where they can gain closeness, bonding and communication.

The large gap between the reality and everyday life and the declarations parents made regarding the importance of family and children, was surprising. It became clear that in everyday life parents do not spend very much time with their children upon returning home from work.

Both stages of the questionnaires included a question regarding average time parents spend talking, "hanging out" and going out together with their adolescents.

One example of the gap between reality and wishes, is presented in the table herein, it reflects the actual time parents spend with their teenagers on an average day. The data was gathered through the questionnaire, (this is question no. 10) where parents were asked to write freely.

Despite the fact that it presents only one question out of many, it clearly represents the gap mentioned above so that even the parents themselves were unaware of. The need to answer such a simple question and confront the meaning of their given answers, surprised and alarmed them, and indicates their sincerity and willingness to boldly look at their lives. The data arises from this table and their honest answers are in correlation to the things that they said during our coaching sessions, as we can see in one of mothers describing the difficulty that she had in finding time:

**Etz:** *"...it's the lack of time to invest... I know I said that I'll sit with the children, talk to them, do thing with them..."*

**Interviewer:** *"is it the lack of time or prioritizing it?"*

**Etz:** *"I said I spend less than 10 minutes with them...and I promised myself not to allow such a situation to happen again, not to be lazy, not to postpone...."*

**How much time (in minutes) a day (on average) do you spend talking to your teenager?**

Minutes per day talking with teenagers			
1-10 minutes	11-30 minutes	31-60 minutes	60+ minutes
7 parents	3 parents	1 parent	3 parents

According to the parents, during most of the time spent with their teenager's, there are other, parallel activities taking place, meaning, their attention is not focused entirely on interacting with the children.

Furthermore, most parents indicated that they do not put any emphasis on having shared dinners or other joint activities throughout the day. Most of them do not share common interests or hobbies with their teenager's, which would open channels for developing discussion, closeness and partnership. When asked a specific question regarding the content and amount of time spent with the children, a third of the parents were honest enough to admit how small their actual involvement was, while the rest claimed that they invested a little more time.

The analysis and interpretation of the pragmatic aspects of the core value “Familyism”, as reflected in the parents' quotations as opposed to the answers given in the questionnaires, suggesting that the statement *“family and children are in the first place”* is primarily theoretical. One might think it is a form of “tax” that needs to be paid in conformity to the Israeli cultural and social context, where parents are expected to feel, speak and behave accordingly to the notion that children and family stand above all. One should remember that most Israeli parents themselves were raised with the same agenda. This normative understanding declares that familyism is the most important value in Israeli society (Lavee & Katz, 2003; Rutlinger-Reiner, 2013), but in everyday life, the value “fades away” and many parents find it very hard to actually act upon.

The discussion regarding this complicated topic was not conducted in a condemnatory or judgmental manner; instead, it was characterized by the attempt at helping parents to discover the connection between their personal beliefs and the actual reality, in some cases being where they meet and confronted their teenager’s and often complain about them. In other words, the ability to understand that the type and amount of time spent together with their teenager’s has a distinctive effect over the quality of their relationship and communication with them.

After the completion of the coaching process, parents were asked the same question once again (regarding the time spent together with their teenager’s). It was clear to see that the time that parents and their teenagers spent together had gone up significantly.

Ed gave a perfect example of significant change regarding the time spent with her children:

**Ed:** *“following the sessions with you, it completely changed, I used to come home from work and start my second job, I wouldn’t rest for a minute... nowadays, I find myself sitting with them for two hours, talking, watching TV shows...”*

Additional change that was easily observed lay in the correlation between reported values versus actual reality. This was discovered by examining the same question regarding mutual activities with adolescents – this time the change was very prominent – most of the parents had doubled or even tripled the time engaged in mutual activities with their teenagers.

After completing the coaching process, we can see significant improvement, since the majority of parents stated that they spent more time with their adolescents. It appears that the time spent in joint recreational activities with teenagers had doubled since discussing and clarifying the value “familyism”.

#### **A.1.2.2 – Respect**

An additional example for a core value raised by parents is “respect”. This is a vague concept that includes many layers that parents relate to, such as: self-respect, respect for others, respectful discussion, accepting diversity and proper interaction. In the following quotations, we can see a few examples of the interpretation of the concept that parents wished to find in their teenagers:

**Ed:** *"there is the thing of giving respect to the person before of you, if you wish to be treated with respect, first of all respect other (...) disrespect goes together with breaking the law. It is all connected – self-respect and respect to others on one hand, and lying and stealing on the other hand"*

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In Avz’s statement, it was easy to see the great importance and significance that he gave to respect:

**Avz:** *There are some things I will argue, fight and insist over, one of them is respecting your parents, does not matter if its Mom or Dad. I will not compromise on this issue.*

\*\*\*

**Edu:** *"respect in my eyes, means respect between people, between one man to another (...) to be able to hear and listen to other people's covert feelings"*

As the parental statements above show, it seems that parents seek to find respectful behavior towards others, good manners and courteous communication free of rudeness in their children.

The concept of respect gets more complicated when parents are asked to reflect on their own behavior and check if they demonstrate the same behaviors that they wish to find in their teenagers. They ask them not to be loud, offensive or “have an attitude” – while presenting these very same attributes when they themselves are in contact with others – as we can see in the following quotations:

**Ed:** *maybe I am less respectful and more demanding (...) As I said earlier, I tend to consider my kids' words perhaps less (...) I am less respectful maybe in the sense of...It happens to me a lot with Ariel especially when he wants something and I say no... It's not nice... I do not respect his view*

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**Etz:** *"(...) it's in the expressions he uses (referring to her husband) the style in which he speaks, it can be violent*

**Interviewer:** *do you mean offensive?*

**Etz:** *offensive in a way I cannot bear (...) it can be towards me or towards the kids, but it is very extreme (...) you speak in yelling; your entire discourse with the kids is... he turns to them in an ordering style, as soon as he opens the door – take your bag. Pick up your shoes... all in shouting... why not open the door and say hello"*

\*\*\*

**Na:** *(talking about her husband and very upset) "he wants good energies, but he himself doesn't speak with good energy, he won't speak good, won't listen to good, he stays in the disgust all the time!*

It seems as if parents themselves tend to forget and neglect the most powerful educational tool – “Modeling”.

### **A.1.2.3 Sharing and Listening**

The majority of parents chose communication as core values in their relationships with their children, most of them expressed their desire to improve, expand and deepen channels of communication with their teenagers. Parents want and expect to be a part of their adolescence children's lives. They want to be perceived by the teenagers as a worthy figure that can be turned to for discussion and consultation. They declare their wish to take an active part in their children's worlds, especially the ones that are outside the "family zone". Many parents go even further by declaring that they wish to be their children's "friends", assuming that they will be included into their "peer or reference group", someone to talk to.

During the discussions on communication, parents agreed that the most crucial building blocks for good communication are the ability to be attentive and genuinely listen, as well as the willingness to be sincere while sharing things. Part of the discourse dealt with the sources from which children learn and internalize patterns and models of conversational manners, sharing and keen listening.

Throughout the sessions, the correlation between everyday behavior and its impact on the quality of communication with teenagers was becoming clear to the parents. They realized that the tight relationship between the instances in which they shared information about themselves, their lives, and their own feelings and the frequency with which their teenagers talked to them. Children learn from their parents' words, and moreover, from their behaviors about the meaning of sincere conversation and recommended levels of disclosure. They are given a model of how to demonstrate interest in others, how to be an active listener, or conversely how to fake interest or attentiveness.

Many of the parents first realized that in order to become meaningful conversation partners with their adolescents, they should be able to initiate personal conversations with them. They became aware of the type of discourse that shares important as well as trivial details from their everyday experiences,

rather than the usual investigation patterns of communication composed of inquiries and informative questions, or approaches that include mainly instructions, remarks, demands and complaints.

Listening skills were noted as an essential component in sincere conversation between people; many of the sessions raised the disparity between “hearing” and “listening”. Parents discovered that many times they were not actually fully attentive to their children, in the best-case scenario, they heard them talking while involved in other activities at the same time.

Here are some honest things parents said about themselves in regard to their listening abilities:

**Interviewer:** *first of all, we need to check within ourselves (...) if we have the patience and attentiveness...*

**Si:** *I don't always have it (...) if I tell you I have in 100% I would be lying (...) sometimes I don't have the patience (...) so I pretend...and they say to me MOM, you're not listening, they catch me within a second. So I say, sorry, sorry...give me a second to get coffee and I'll be with you... she was right, I wasn't with her"*

\*\*\*

**Avz:** *I find myself listening only to things I want to hear (...) there is a problem in my listening patterns, because I am a stubborn man (...) one day I asked my daughter Hadar why she doesn't speak to me, and she said – why should I? Do you talk to me?...what could I say... she was right (...) then I realized that if I want her to tell me things, I need to let go, tell her about myself, and stop the selective listening"*

Active, deep and genuine listening is only possible when parents abandon any other activity that they are involved in, and give the child, especially teenagers, their full attention and the feeling that they are truly interested in what they have to say.

During the coaching process, parents recognized their own “double standards” regarding behavioral norms, which disregard and even contradict their selected values, the ones they had defined as their core as human beings. They noticed that they ask their teenagers (and others) to behave in a way that they themselves, as responsible adults, did not. For example, cellphone use: one of



the mothers found herself yelling at her 14 year-old teenager to “stop using the cell phone” while simultaneously texting on her own...

The justifications and excuses for such parental behavior are vast; busy schedules and routines, long working hours, difficulty in navigating between career and family life, tiredness ...all of these statements are indeed valid; parents in Western society have a lot on their plate, considering their multiple roles, tasks, expectations and dreams.

On the one hand parents wish to raise a family (the average Israeli family has more than one child), acting as good, supportive, and thoughtful parents, who know how to provide an appropriate response for expressive needs. On the other hand, there is an expectation to provide the family with a dignified livelihood and meet material needs, wishes and aspirations in this consumer driven world. In addition, as individuals, regardless of their role as parents, they are expected to pursue a successful career, good employment, higher education and leisure standards. All of the above puts a huge burden of personal and social expectations on people, a load that increases significantly once becoming a parent. Parents find themselves caught up in compromise, evasions and self-justifications, in order to manage the multiple roles they have taken on. One of the outcomes of such parental juggling is the existing gap between the idealization of “values” as building blocks for optimal personal and parental identity, and the ability to live and act upon the same values in reality.

This point is well illustrated when looking at one such value, “independence” that many parents chose as a core value:

***Mi: Independence***

***Interviewer: Complicated value***

***Mi: true***

***Ar: yes, there are gaps (...) between what we say and do***

***Mi: we would very much like to raise the kids to be independent but we do not always enable it.***

***Interviewer: why? What prevents you from making it happen?***

*Mi: We are too protective, guard and wrap the kids*

*Interviewer: what would happen if you didn't worry and decide?*

*Mi: then they will not succeed*

*Interviewer: so what lies underneath?*

*Ar: it is all in us*

*Mi: it's kind of control*

\*\*\*

*Of: independence...I cannot explain to them to be independent because I do a lot of things for them...*

## **A.2 The "Ten Commandments"<sup>20</sup>**

After having each individual parent, independently of their partners, map the most important values for themselves, both as private individuals and as parents, it made sense to agree upon a coherent framework of the imperative values for each couple as family leaders, which would present a united parental front.

The parents were asked to go through the process of mapping and selecting ten shared values ("Ten Commandments"), together as homework, outside the coaching sessions. Parents told of the difficulties and disagreements they encountered when attempting to form a united set of values that they could both accept completely.

The following categories contain the "Ten Commandments", the mutual values chosen by the parents as the most important ones:

**Proper conduct toward others** – respect, trust, integrity, fairness and honesty

**Emotional Intelligence** – sensitivity, openness, empathy, compassion, support, patience and positivity

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<sup>20</sup> . "Ten commandments" is an acceptable phrase, a metaphor in Hebrew Referring to "the most important thing".

**Communication with others** – communication, friendship and family relations

**The Ability to love and enjoy** – love, joy and fun

**The Ability to lead** – leadership, creativity, initiative, persistence, independence, self-image, diligence and health

**Organizational skills** – order, planning and accuracy

The analysis of the “Ten Commandments” exercise described above revealed that all values appeared on the personal value list of at least one of the parents. The “Ten Commandments” are a mixture of both parents' personal ones, with no new values added. The joint process of choosing common values gave yet another opportunity for the parents to detect and select the fundamental elements by which they conduct themselves and run their family.

A large part of the selected “Ten Commandments”, deals with values related to developing emotional intelligence, which is at the base of any intrapersonal or interpersonal relationship, no matter who or where the person is. These skills enable a person to be conscientious, manage and regulate their feelings in order to maintain suitable relations with others. Another significant part of the “Ten Commandments” leans on values that cultivate qualities and abilities that can lead to personal and professional development in the future.

### **A.3 Practical implementation of Values (defining boundaries)**

In many families, the pattern of constant arguments between parents and teenagers is common; every issue, as trivial as it may be, is suddenly rendered a significant and essential controversial matter, a cause for anger, disappointment and frustration. Many of these conflicts would erupt spontaneously, neither premeditated nor controlled, and unrelated to the origins of the intense argument.

In most cases, the arguments have nothing to do with noteworthy or crucial topics, or anything that derives from the core values parents try to bestow upon their children.

It seems as if parents are dragged into these arguments without having the chance to ascertain with themselves whether it is really worth the fight, worth insisting upon. These constant confrontations create a murky atmosphere at home, cause distance between parents and teenagers, lead to miscommunication that might escalate into the creation of a huge divide, and overall spread a dark shadow over the already fragile relationships between parents and teenagers.

Following the long process of mapping, discussing and selecting the most important values for parents as individuals and as parents, it seemed only natural to explore the possible ways that could assist parents in implementing their selected values, realistically and daily. The “Light” exercise assumes that limits and boundaries should derive from the core values parents selected and defined. The exercise enabled parents to delineate in a clear, graphic way the topics of disagreement and conflict that exist between them and their teenagers.

- **“Red Light”** – represents the topics that are a complete “must”, from the parental point of view, where they draw red lines. These are the cases, where parents were not willing to compromise or negotiate; they will be “equally stubborn”, even at the price of engaging in agonizing and furious arguments.
- **“Yellow Light”** – represents issues that are subject to negotiation and discussion. Parents exhibit readiness to listen to the teenager's point of view and are open to changing their opinion even in the face of disagreement.
- **“Green Light”** – issues where parents usually agree upon without needing to fight over, insist upon or alter; the teenagers are in complete control, even if they are matters of disagreements or different priorities on the part of the parents.
-

Even though this exercise might look simple, in fact it was not easy for parents since it forced them to confront the gap between their ideal personal values and the “Ten Commandments” and the reality of their coping skills and choices.

### **Red Light**

Surprisingly, despite the long list of personal and parental values, when having to pinpoint the issues to insist upon i.e. issues that draw "a red line", parents did not select many. While there was only little correlation between participating couples, they did agree upon four main critical matters, where there would be no negotiation or discussion with their teens. The highest consensus was reached with regard to the issue of physical and verbal violence; all parents agreed that there would be zero tolerance for any kind of abuse, bullying or aggression.

Next was the topic of any variation of breaking the law, where there would be no dialogue or leniency.

The third issue noted, included concerns over safety and security, and here too, all parents agreed that there would be no compromising, although there were differences amongst the parents regarding their definition of safety and security, for example - there were parents who were willing to buy their teenagers electric bikes as opposed to others who completely rejected the idea.

The last issue dealt with behaviors and manners, which included self-respect, respect for others, and ways of talking, "chutzpah" (disrespect) and lying. With regard to unhealthy substance use, such as drugs, alcohol and cigarettes, some controversies came up amongst the parents. Some unconditionally rejected the idea, while others who argued that since it is a critical issue that is very hard to control, it might be more effective to have an open dialog and conversation in order try to minimize the damages.

In the course of the coaching process, two cases relevant to the last issue were brought up – one of the teenagers, aged 16 years old, came home drunk, and one of the mothers discovered that her son smokes regularly.

**Li:** *"it was pure hell for me to discover that my son is smoking... I did not stop crying for two days; endless crying as if the child is dead. I couldn't accept it, it was terrible, it was so disappointing, why is he doing it"*

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**Mi:** *Ronnie got drunk...she went out with her boyfriend and drank a little too much...I got up in the morning and found her throwing up heavily, poor thing (...) but I was happy, it's a good way to learn*

**Interviewer:** *how did you react?*

**Mi:** *great, very simple reaction (...) she said herself; it's good that it happened; now I know what my limits are and what is good for my body*

**Ar:** *we didn't say anything. She told all her friends and was very pleased that her parents didn't judge her and weren't angry with her*

**Interviewer:** *was there anything you wanted to say but didn't?*

**Mi:** *I didn't*

**Ar:** *yes!! Are you crazy? Why do you drink like that? But I didn't. I was just there for her."*

### **Yellow Light**

Regarding controversial issues that leave room for negotiation between parents and teenagers, there was a large variety of topics and there was great diversity between the couples. As noted above, there were parents who were willing to discuss the use of unhealthy substances (yellow light), while others would not tolerate it (red light).

The majority of yellow light topics referred to teenagers' personal choices - starting with appearance (cloths, make-up, and hair), choice of friends, participation in family outings or chores at home, having sex and completing school assignments.

### **Green Light**

This category described types of disagreements that parents tended not to interfere with, insist upon, or argue about. The various topics included; summer jobs, morning wake up time, choices for spending pocket money and helping around the house.

In principle, it was expected that the mapping selection made by parents for the "light" exercise, be directly drawn from their previous value selection (as mentioned earlier) and would be the practical expression of their theoretical value system. In actuality however, there were many topics where we could witness discrepancies or even contradictions between statements and practice. For instance, maintaining the teenager's room neat and clean was selected by many parents to be in the zone of the "green light". Most parents stated that this topic is flexible, not worth fighting over; therefore, they leave it up to their teenager's choice. On the other hand, when discussing this matter in our sessions, I came upon different voices:

**Interviewer:** *"do you argue with them on cleaning their room?"*

**Je:** *"Of course, (...) it's not a fight (...) stubbornness of both of us"*

**Eti:** *"today, for example, they left their rooms extremely messy"*

**Interviewer:** *"does that bother you?"*

**Eti:** *"very much. Usually I'm at home so I take care of their rooms and today I decided that I am not going to do that and they will take care of it, but sometimes I still clean up their rooms"*

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**Si:** (turning to her husband) *"I have a question...regarding you and Zahi...have you never mentioned a word about his room?"*

**Hez:** *about the room, hundreds of times (...) hundreds of times. Zahi please clean up...just last Saturday, only after the fifth time I asked, only after fifteen minutes later he stood up and picked up the towels (...) there are some things that trouble me, and I can't watch it. So, if after all my begging it still doesn't happen, so there's not much choice, so I do it*

## **Summary**

Values play a significant and central role in the course of the personal coaching process. They are perceived as a set system of paradigms and principals that reflect a person's basic needs, traits, abilities and skills. They constitute a set of guidelines by which people may examine themselves and the surrounding environment, from which they choose to embrace norms and behaviors. Values

are considered an internal part, inseparable from the personality, and as such, it makes them one of the major tools in the coaching processes.

A person's beliefs and desires can be identified through the mapping process, making this an important step towards recognizing one's personal and parental vision. Many typologies aim to define the place of values within the coaching process. Dolan ( 2011) divides the total values into 3 main categories:

1. Ethical values – central to any coaching process, such as - Trustworthiness, integrity and justice.
2. Practical values – practiced on a daily basis, such as flexibility, professionalism and planning.
3. Emotional values - representing the average person's emotional world, including courage, daring and love.

From these examples and others, which I have encountered during the process, several important insights regarding the relation between parents and values became evident:

- The majority of parents are not aware of the core value that motivates them as individuals or parents. Most of their values are taken in during their own socialization process, an automatic process starting in childhood and continuing throughout life. Therefore, a great part of any personal decisions including parental decisions and choices, are based on these values absorbed during childhood and adolescence, without conscious awareness or choice. In general, throughout life, people do not have many opportunities to stop and examine their core values and the ways in which they are manifested in reality. Most of us are inclined to act automatically. The complex confrontation of a person with his or her values is usually made possible in the course of therapy, consultation or coaching. In that context, there is a deliberate halting of the “routine-carousel”, in order to allow for the inspection of one's inner core and character.



- When trying to select values (personal and/or parental), it seemed that parents tend to shy away from recognizing real, authentic values, in favor of idealistic and superior ones. The impression is that of a global human trait, where there is a preference to perceiving oneself in an idealistic way, and to identifying with higher value cores, different from the ones acted upon in everyday life.

The most important conclusion that emerged from the sessions dedicated to the topic of values is the recognition of the big gap found between parents' selected values (personal or family values) and their actual daily behavior. This recognition may be the foundation for the achievement of change in parent-teenager relations.

## **B. Second Theme – Focusing on Parents**

### **Introduction**

As Cohen (2010) stated, during the twentieth century parents became “the transparent class”, referred to merely as a means to improve their children's lives. The main focus of this research was on the possible ways in which communication patterns between parents and teenagers might be changed or affected when parents are given a place in the center of attention.

The cultural “Bon-Ton” of the Western world following in suit with the notion of this being “the century of the child” (Bryant & Peck, 2006), assumes the centrality of the child as a basic hypothesis. This then, becomes regarded as a value in its own right, by which children are at the center of their parents' world, which consequently revolves around them. This is a central concept in Israel society, as addressed in the literature review p.34.

Regardless of the large amount of experience and literature in the field, raising children is still often perceived of as a continuous and Sisyphean process, undertaken by people who for the most part have no prior understanding of the difficulties, hardships, conflicts and obstacles to be expected along the way.

Parenthood is an endless series of large and small tasks surrounding children's lives, leaving parents with little time to focus on themselves and their own world. This is caused by the fact that children's' needs and wishes are being prioritized over parents' dreams, needs and ambitions as private individuals.

The current study tries to shine a small spotlight on the parents and place them in the center. A major parental goal is to be the best possible parent. However, this is difficult to accomplish when so little time is invested in getting to know oneself. Any person, including parents of course, should be able to allow him/herself to become acquainted with the inner core of their values and beliefs, and the realistic ability to act in accordance. In my humble opinion, this is a necessary step for self-development, which could then lead to better parenthood and improved communication with children and teenagers in particular.

### **B.1. The pleasure of being centralized**

One of the observable themes that emerged during the coaching process, was the surprise and pleasure that parents felt from clearly and explicitly being the center of attention, for a change. As mentioned above, centralizing children in Israeli society is a common cultural virtue.

Parents, on the other hand, are usually judged by the way they fulfill their parental duties as an instrument working to improve their children's lives. The social cultural orientation in Israel is to actually look past the parents and on to their children, when relating to the latter's' needs, development, and health.

Suddenly, a whole individual, whose parenthood defines only part of his/her being, has become transparent, with the "true" role having been transformed into one of devoting life to the children. In general, the parental role is perceived as taking care of children on all fronts – giving unconditional love, acceptance, security and safety, providing for physical needs such as food, shelter and clothing, affording education that fulfills personal potential and preparing the children for the adult world.

In a two-year study (1997-1998) which included 400 Israeli parents, they were asked, how they perceived their parental role. Following is a quote from that research that summarizes their answer: *"Parents believe that first and foremost it is important to satisfy the children's mental needs, to provide educational needs, imbue values, confront and cope with hardships of life, shape their future personality and provide for the physical needs of children"*.<sup>21</sup>

In light of this cultural picture that is widely acknowledged in Israel, most of the participant parents were surprised to realize that the coaching sessions were intended to primarily focus on them as individuals, and only later on their parental roles, with teenager concerns being marginalized as a byproduct of the overall process.

**Ed:** *"clearly, it was all about me...it's not changing Ariel or the children; it was all about changing me"*

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**Of:** *"The parents (...) it managed to focus only on parents"*

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**Si:** *I'll tell you what I believe (...) the largest weight for kids is the parents*

**Interviewer:** *do you mean that the most important tool in education is me?*

**Si:** *a child is born with DNA but he is blank, I am the one who creates and encrypts the content into this vessel I delivered. So if I engraved good content it will be good, I vested less – it will come out less. So what do you do in order to get the best? I go to professionals and ask them to provide me with the best tools for my kids so I could confer the best content I can. (...)*

**Si:** *when a child makes problems or something, we rush to take him to therapy, not ourselves. At some point we look at ourselves as perfect, everything we do is fine, let's take him to a therapist (...) but where am I going? I think that we as parents are no less in the middle of it.*

**Si:** *it's us, it's totally us. I think we screw up our children or save them. Really...it's not them. They are born that way...the question is what do I do with it*

**Hez:** *our behavior reflects it all*

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<sup>21</sup><http://www.rinacohen.org/?p=1>

*Si: Our behavior either leads them to the right behavior in their life if I do it right...now many times we laugh. Let's take them to therapy...everything we will take them, but ourselves? It's rare to see parents that go to therapy*

\*\*\*

*Mi: Yes, it's all on us (...) it all starts in the head*

*Ar: The fact that it gave us tools and it treated us, obviously got through down to the entire home and atmosphere (...) in other parent programs it goes to practical venues like...do the dishes... do that. Here it is deeper. A longer process. That you go with yourself, being aware*

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*Li: ...if we change our behavior then it could be that also them...that are what's happened. I'll change...I am a role model*

## **B.2. Parents as Subjective**

Throughout the coaching sessions, I have encountered two contradicting processes that occurred simultaneously. As noted earlier, on one hand parents enjoyed the fact that they were the center of attention in the process, and felt it was the right way to deal with parents since they are the ones who pave the way for the children. On the other hand, in the course of the conversations, it appeared difficult for them to stay focused on their subjective experience, and they were often inclined to escape to concrete issues concerning their children. It was clear that most participants preferred to talk about their teenagers, discuss their daily conflicts with them and reflect on their parental role, rather than concentrate on themselves as independent human beings.

My impression is that the majority of parents found it hard to be at the center of attention for a long time (in spite of the initial surprise and excitement), feeling uncomfortable with unveiling their world, examining their beliefs, values and thoughts. Furthermore, they tried to avoid mentioning things that might expose their difficulties such as pain, disappointment or shame.

The coaching sessions invited them to an encounter with deep personal elements that do not occupy us in our day-to-day routine. The coaching process constructs a scene for exposure where the clients (or coachees) are asked to

boldly look at themselves and their core values, genuinely and thoroughly examining their lives, thoughts, expectations, wishes and beliefs.

There were moments during the sessions where some parents had to face issues within themselves that they had repressed for a long time, or deal with experiences that were still painful and sensitive.

**Edu:** *Yes...as if I am carrying with me frustrations that...I don't know why. It's not the first time I realize that. When I think about it, I start checking...everything is ok, the kids are healthy, everything is good... and yet there is something that makes me think negatively and I don't know why. Don't know.*

\*\*\*

**Mi:** *"I felt lonely, like I have no back, I have no one to lean on or turn to, that I am alone (...) I also always hid it. I didn't want anyone to know (...) People didn't know I don't have a mother, that I was alone...they didn't know..."*

**Interviewer:** *so it's not only that you shut yourself out, you also had to hold two "Mi"s, the one inside and the one outside which is very exhausting emotionally..*

**Mi:** *Very*

In general, it looks like it is easier for parents to hold on to the "child as the center" model, which is the one most of us were raised on, than directly confront and deal with themselves and their personal motivations as private individuals as well as parents.

This difficulty in confronting one's self was intensified since both parents attended each session. In other words, beyond the personal difficulty of encountering and dealing with their "self", which in itself is a process demanding great personal honesty, there was an additional subtext taking place. The structure of the sessions forced parents to be able to demonstrate honesty and openness in front of their spouses and by doing so expose themselves to the possibility of receiving judgmental looks, criticism and unsupportive comments from the other parent.

### **B.3. Personality Components – qualities, barriers, abilities**

In part of the coaching sessions, the parents were asked to notice their pool of qualities and abilities as humans, which they bring to the parenting toolkit. In addition, they were encouraged to ask people close to them to describe such qualities that they saw in them. Another part, through deep discussion, dealt with the barriers or limitations that prevent parents from fulfilling their personal aspirations at being the best parents possible (according to their own definition). Understanding that people often feel uncomfortable when discussing their qualities, considering it to be arrogant, abrasive and immodest, I chose to bypass this barrier by asking each participant to approach three people who knew them well and to list his strengths as a person. As expected, the parents felt embarrassed by this task, which they felt was too excessive but mainly because they felt uncomfortable asking others to praise them.

When I gently insisted, that they turn to siblings, friends and colleagues, in order to receive answers to the question aimed at revealing positive traits, unique abilities and other strengths. The way the parents experienced this exercise varied. Some were very excited and eager to come to the next session, and it was obvious that it was important and even urgent for them to share with their spouse and me this extraordinary empowering experience of getting positive feedback and being praised by others. Other parents were a little skeptical regarding the things that friends and relatives said, since the series of compliments seemed unreliable to them while others were somewhat disappointed to get laconic answers from people that they expected would invest more in this exercise on their behalf.

In any event, it turned out to be an empowering and exciting experience for all. The importance of this exercise stems from the realization of how easily most of us will criticize, judge, and get angry with ourselves. It is easier for us to list our faults and misconduct than to praise ourselves or even just look positively to spot our fine virtues.

**Ed:** ... it was embarrassing to ask that from people (...) sure, it's...I couldn't deliberate on it because it felt too arrogant to do that

**Mo:** *The truth is I have never heard these things... It was exciting*

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**Je:** *It's very powerful getting it from someone else. I got so excited (...) Very, as if I didn't expect it...*

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**Interviewer:** *how did it feel for you? Was it embarrassing?*

**Hez:** *Embarrassing? No...the thing is it credible?*

**Interviewer:** *Did the things he said seems unreliable to you? As if it was too good to be true?*

**Hez:** *Could be*

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**Si:** *I think that this exercise gave me some outside perspective to see things in myself that I don't...*

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**Mi:** *Let's say someone comes and tells me nice things, regardless of what happened now...I'm embarrassed. I blush...I don't feel comfortable (...)I think of myself, I am aware of myself and my abilities but when someone comes and tells me – I feel embarrassed. I don't know how to explain it (...) Look, all I had in all these reactions...this warmth I am getting...once I was...Not once – until recently. I felt uncomfortable when people praised me (...) Wow. I was very excited*

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**Avi:** *It's like injecting goodness directly into the vein*

Ironically, the discussion regarding limitations seemed to come more easily and naturally to parents, as if it was subtly understood to be socially and culturally legitimate to admit and disclose our faults. Conversely, it would appear that admitting to and deliberating on our strong and positive qualities, is perceived as unsuitable, not to be spoken about aloud or exhibited publicly.

Nevertheless, the mapping process of barriers and limitations was still harsh on parents, since it forced them to face behaviors and characteristics that are viewed as inappropriate and unworthy in their own eyes. It was not easy in light

of the fact that so far, they had managed to avoid honestly facing themselves, repressing everything that was difficult to acknowledge.

Parents were given a list of typical and common barriers and were asked to select five that constituted a genuine obstacle, preventing them from achieving their goals, desired feelings and favored connections, which they had planned and wished for themselves. The main five barriers selected by parents as especially relevant in preventing them from fulfilling themselves (as individuals as well as parents) were:

1. Settle in the comfort zone
2. Fear of failing
3. Procrastination
4. Setting goals for themselves that were too low/high
5. Belief that "One day we'll get there" but now is not the time

#### **B.4. Parental Agenda**

The last part of the coaching process dealt with personal perceptions of components, which parents find important and significant for beneficial parenting. This observation was possible through small, personal even symbolic questions, the kind that largely circumvents the cognitive mechanisms that allow people to avoid dealing with sensitive issues and make room for a more genuine perception of their world.

One of the questions tried to compose the model of an ideal parent. Parents were asked to investigate their close and more distant surroundings and try to identify the image of a successful parent, while categorizing the overall qualities/behaviors, which make him/her worthy in their eyes.

**Hez and Si** - described Si's brother who lives abroad as a role model for them of a successful and significant parent

*Hez: "It's a character I know the guy for 20 years and I never heard him raise his voice or swear...or expresses himself in a vulgar way, because someone made him angry (...)"*

*Si: "The "togetherness" ...a lot of it, the family is in the first place before work and before anything else...first are the kids, first is the wife, first is the*



*family...he sacrifices a lot for this priority, I mean, they are a lot together, many trips, although they also have nannies and housekeepers they have everything(... ) He has a lot of this togetherness with the son, together and alone with the girls (...) He would go with his son to basketball games because he found it interesting and they go to the movies together. He would spend time with the girls doing girls stuff..."*

Hez and Si agree and appreciated the way the brother dedicates himself to raising his family, and even sacrifices his personal needs and aspirations. Hez relates to this sensitive issue due to the fact that he works over 12 hours a day and therefore misses being at home for many hours. In his opinion, supportive parenting is only possible when he will decide to spend more hours at home.

**Hez:** *I want to be in this situation when I am home more often*

**Interviewer:** *What needs to happen to make you execute it?*

**Hez:** *My decision. I don't need anything else*

These statements of Si and Hez reflect one of the most preferred values chosen by most parents – familyism. With their description of the brother as the perfect parent, totally devoting his life to his family, they emphasize the notion that children and family come first, prior to the self.

Another question focused on the attempt to map qualities of a successful parent from their point of view. It is important to remember that these questions were asked at the very end of the coaching sessions after deliberating over and discussing core values, barriers and abilities – as noted above. The answers reflect new perceptions of the characteristics of successful parenthood.

**Interviewer:** *What does it mean to be a successful parent? In a sentence*

**Hez:** *Has good communications*

**Si:** *the ability to give and listen to the child*

**Interviewer** (turns to Hez): *OK. What do you like about yourself as a parent?*

**Hez:** *Family commitment, the endless love for the kids and my wife, for being a couple, for the family.*

**Interviewer** (turns to Si): *what do you like in yourself as a parent?*

*Si: I love being a mom (...) kids give me...more than what I give them...the love and fun to wake up in the morning and to be there with them. To go out with them, as if...the idea that you wake up in the morning and you just enjoy them.*

**Interviewer:** *what would you give up as a parent? (...) one behavior or quality*

*Si: That I get mad sometimes it's a redundant quality to have (...) I could do it in a different way (...) I want to defuse the anger. Or the way I get mad at them.*

\*\*\*

**Interviewer:** *"...what is a successful parent?... Give me five, six qualities of the successful parent...what do you see?"*

*Mi: "Successful parent in my eyes is a parent that gives his child love, tools for success, tool to cope with people"*

*Ar: "to give him love, to give him the best tools to deal with good and bad...to make the right decisions not only when we are around but in general, in life...and mainly tools"*

Questions regarding the parenting agenda were placed on the coaching table. We compared the initial parental agenda, which the parents had brought to the coaching process, to the new one that they had developed after experiencing all the components of our sessions.

The parenting agenda has many elements, partially resulting from the emotional abilities and needs of the parents such as the ability to love, to physically show affection, contain and empower their children, and partially from the need to be seen, to be accepted and to have reciprocated relationships with their children. Hence, focusing on the parental agenda, involves looking at a complex, large and fundamental framework that is deeply rooted in the world of values. Yet it also results from the attempt to answer questions such as – ‘what are the things that are most important for parents to bestow upon their child?’ What legacy would a parent like to leave behind? How would a parent wish to be remembered by their child once they themselves became adults?

## Summary

A little question, pseudo naïve, was presented to the parents right before the end of the last session – ‘what would you like your children to say about you once you are gone?’ Almost parent, both mothers and fathers were deeply touched by this question and were excited in a way that was obvious in their body language (blushing, tears etc.). It was right there, at that specific moment, when the real need and expectation to be acknowledged, to be meaningful and loved made itself known. These are the things they told me:

- *My mom was a good mother*
- *My dad was funny, loving and caring*
- *My dad took care of me*
- *My mom was everything to me, cool mother*
- *My dad was kind and cared about family, he was right!*
- *My mom was containing, consulting, listener, helping when in need, not judgmental, caring*
- *My dad was containing, attentive, his advice was good, gave his soul for us*
- *My mom was a good soul, loving and hugging*
- *My dad was a loving father that gave me values for life, he was funny*
- *The best mom in the world*
- *Cool and fun dad*

## **C. Third Theme – Parent-children relationships**

### **Introduction**

When parents are asked to prioritize the various roles and other functions that they fulfill in their lives, the vast majority almost immediately tend to place parenting at the top of the list. Most parents honestly sense that the most important and central component in their lives, are their children; hence, the most critical role they have, is parenthood, the most challenging and noteworthy responsibility throughout their lives.

Where do parents learn how to fill this essential role, which is so central in their lives as defined by them? This is one of the very few roles in a person's life, where no prior training is required; there is no protocol or control over the parental tasks, no manuscript and no constant counseling involved.

### **C.1. Conscious Parenthood**

The coaching process confronted parents with the critical importance of maintaining relationships with their teenagers from a cognizant, realistic and wide point of view, rather than in an "automatic" and routine way. Participants mentioned that parenting young kids was "more simple and easy". This statement was not referring to the intensive, ongoing, daily care of babies and the needs of toddlers but rather with regard to dealing with the emotional, educational and disciplinary issues of youngsters, which they found was much easier than dealing with the challenges that their teenagers presented.

During the sessions, parents were asked to consider other parental behaviors such as manners, ways of speech and body language, only to find that in many cases they contradicted the personal and family values that they had chosen.

The gap between ideology and reality does not result from the lack of concern or interest and certainly not from bad intentions, but merely because parenting happens on its own. One day a child is born and a person becomes a parent.

As pointed out earlier, most parents internalize the parenting patterns by which they raise their own children by. These develop from the home that they grew up in themselves, from their social environment – friends, neighbors, extended

family and also from the wider cultural context that they are a part of such as religion or nationality.

*Li: True, no one taught us...No one...we don't know how to do that*

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*Ed: ...we were never taught how to be parents. They did not come with a recipe instructions or guidance...*

All parents stated that they try to do the best for “the most important thing in their life”. Inherent to the parenting process, is the feeling that they cause “inevitable” damage to their teenagers.”.

*Si: 99% of the time, parents try to do the best and yet many times we fail. Only afterwards, we realize that, post mortem. You never notice that the moment it happens. That is why it is wise to reserve a therapist to which they will complain on how terrible their mother was, when they grow up ...*

In the course of the sessions, parents shared part of the reality they experience with the teenagers. They talked about moments in which they felt lost; not really knowing how to address the changes that their children were experiencing (adolescence), not understanding what modifications they need to do within themselves and the way they educate their children in correspondence with the teenagers’ new reality.

Most parents admit that they find themselves acting in various ways simultaneously, some even contradictory. They were honest about admitting how most of their actions do not really result from a decision-making process or conscious choices. Mostly it comes from a reactive mode to situations met in reality: trial and error, avoiding unbearable conditions, bursting into screaming, loss of control in cases of anger and insult, threats and punishments, constructing terms and conditions, distancing or ordering discourse.

All of the above “educational” tactics are born mainly from confusion or a sense of loss of meaning and control. A lack of initiative, motivation and laziness, also prevent parents from trying to find alternative solutions and other effective channels of communication.

*Si: I don't want to think how much we hurt ourselves and how much we damaged the kids. We kept our heads down until the storm was over...*

*\*\*\**

*Li: "I see that while it happens and I say to myself, Li come down...when Omer was 5 we took him to day care (...) everyone was dressed in white...and I said why is everybody wearing white? He told me...its Passover party. So, I ask him: why didn't you tell me...and I get mad at him real bad (...) I kept on yelling at him and I can't stop...and I know inside that I'm taking my anger out on him. (...) I returned home with him, ordering him to wear this shirt and he does not want to (...) I will never forget it; I broke down for the first time in my life...I just wanted to die. He didn't want to go back and I forced him (...) he was so young and tiny...I took a chair and threw it in his direction, not to hit him god forbid, but I remember I took him out and he was in shock. I sat down and started crying...you know...and at the same time talking to myself, what is wrong with you, are you crazy? I lost it...I took him afterward back to the day care and he was very distant. He had a great teacher and she saw that something had happened and asked what happen...and then I started to cry again. I asked her to hug him the whole day... because of this stupid Passover...and I cried the whole day at work and I felt I lost myself and it felt terrible, as if I know I'm wrong and it's not OK..."*

Very few parents, if any, initiate observation, reflection or conscious analysis regarding their educational choices, trying to link them to their values, beliefs or opinions. On many instances, parenthood relies on "automatic pilot" that triggers common behavior, this without prior consideration of the motivations or related results that accompany each parental decision or action.

At other times, educational choices are based on the fear of the reaction of others, such as "what will they say, think..." There are cases of criticism or rejection coming from the environment, judging parental decisions and behaviors. In other cases, people around us might think badly of our children and the way they behave, and by doing so, a hidden message is conveyed - we are presenting parental failure, and the way we choose to raise and educate our children is generally disappointing.

*Edu: ... a big part of my decisions comes from thinking what will people say about it. What will they think of me (...) for example – if my father will see that Omer is smoking, I will die*

## **C.2. Parents as Agents for Change**

A key question we discussed during the sessions touched upon the most significant education tools that a person collects from their life experience. Parents were trying to answer this question, by remembering themselves as children in their parents' home and comparing these memories to situations with their children and teenagers. Most agreed that "modeling" is an important tool for raising and educating children but were surprised by the intensity; they were impressed by the importance and implications embedded in the way parents become role models for their children. Most of all, they were overwhelmed by the huge gap between the way parents expect their children to behave and the way they themselves, actually behave.

Most of the participating parents were amazed when recognizing and realizing the scope of "double standards" behaviors they display when asking teenagers to behave in a certain way where actually, they themselves as family leaders behaved in a complete opposite manner. At first, most parents thought that the most significant influence on teenagers comes from their peers. Assuming that teenagers do not seem to care about or listen to their parents, it is not so important how they (the parents) choose to behave, since their influence over their teenagers is minor anyway. In the course of the sessions, I asked parents to pay attention to this statement and the way in which it is reflected in their daily life.

Only after parents encountered such occurrences, were they were able to internalize the fact, that in spite of peer group importance, parents still have a valuable place in the teenagers' life. Teenagers still need a guiding hand, boundaries - flexible and dynamic ones, but nevertheless boundaries, they are in need of a strong and confident parent who can handle and contain resistance, rebellion, confusion and uncertainty, while simultaneously remaining a solid parent to lean on.

Parents shared the understanding that their teenagers know them very well, and can anticipate their every reaction, while constantly testing for gaps between their parents' statements and behavior.

At the end of the coaching sessions, parents realized the power of role modeling as the most effective means for educating. The personal way a parent chooses to behave – the way he/she speaks, acts or conduct relations with others have the most powerful influence over children. Teenagers as well as younger children easily detect inconsistency, lack of authenticity and injustice, but regardless of what their parents may say, children follow and imitate them, for better or for worse. The parents realized that there could be no room for any gap between what they say and what they do, contrary to the saying “do what I say and not what I do”.

This discussion made it possible to scrutinize and confirm the research hypothesis, which dealt with the influence that heightened awareness in parents regarding their own behavior, can have on their relationships with their children. Throughout the entire process, the focus was on the parents' personality, complexity and characteristics, recognizing this to be the key towards creating change.

At the beginning of the coaching process, parents expected to discuss daily difficulties and conflicts they encounter with their teenagers, and to be given “tips” on how to change the children. Parents quickly realized that there was no intention to change the teenagers, for one thing, because it is not in our power to do so. Only then, did parents internalized the immense power of self-change as a tool to facilitate and improve bonding, communication and atmosphere in every relationship in their lives, especially in the one with their teenagers. Once the parents had fully recognized the importance of managing conscious parenting, and realizing the power and effect of modeling, they were ready to discuss their own possible initiatives.

### **C.3. Parental Pro-activism**

After mapping their personal and parental core values, most participants agreed that connection and communication could be considered main values. They expressed their desire to establish channels of communication with their teenagers, which are open, flowing, smooth and natural.



**Interviewer:** *what would you consider the most important tool in parenting?*

**Li:** *talking (...) connection*

**Edu:** *communication*

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**Avz:** *look, there is a problem in my communication with the kids. It has to improve somehow. I am saying – there is a problem (...) I think that what I am trying to achieve from these meetings, is that I understand now that as a parent I cannot make my children change if the foundations of our communication are not strong and tight. I cannot motivate them to study or do anything (...)*

\*\*\*

**Eti:** *I would like to improve the communication I have with her (...) I want her to trust me and feel that if she feels bad, she can tell me anything so I can help her...*

**Je:** *I feel I don't have a lot of communication with them, they are not...I mean, they are not free with me (...) they will not talk to me the way they talk to her... (points at his wife)*

Only some of the participants were able to see the connection between building such communication channels and the need for parental initiative and activism. Most of them described a stressed daily routine trying to manage their set of roles – at work, in their families or with friends. Within this heavily loaded routine, it seems like the subject of quality communication with close family members (spouse and children) is either pushed aside or conducted while performing other tasks at the same time (cleaning, watching TV, using smart phone and so on) the result being that it becomes automatic, superficial, and decreasing over time.

This way of conducting communication with teenagers utterly contradicts parents' declared aspiration to take an active and meaningful part in their teenager's lives, and to become somebody they can turn to for sharing, support and guidance. It certainly counteracts the choice of communication as the number one value in their lives.

As the teenagers grow up, and their peer groups become more central in their lives, parents begin to notice the increasing distance between their different content worlds. The teens spend less and less time at home, their answers become shorter and most of their activities are outside, away from their parents. At this stage, parents feel as if they have lost the central, influential and authoritative place they used to have in their children's life. They notice that many days may pass in which they have only shared laconic or technical verbal interactions with them.

The table shown on p. 122 regarding the actual time spent with teenagers, symbolically reflects the inconsistency between the declaration that "children are the most important thing in our lives" and the expression of this in reality. When this information was presented to the parents, most of them were shocked and disappointed, trying to justify and explain it in various ways.

Most parents blamed the stressful and demanding modern life style, which is overloaded with tasks, roles and errands, as the main reason for not being able to communicate with their teenagers, as they would like to. While mapping, discussing and analyzing the personal and parental core values selected, other reasons for the parents' distancing themselves from their teenagers became clear – for some parents, it was due to laziness, the desire to stay in their comfort zone, feeling exhausted and "burnt out", or merely wanting to spend some time alone at the end of a working day.

In one of the exercises, one of the fathers chose the picture of a television as a symbol of his parenthood; this is how he explains the choice:

**Interviewer:** *"how does TV represent your parenthood?"*

**Of:** *"yes, TV represents the things I love... TV is me. I love the quiet times to watch TV, all I want is to be left alone. Quiet. This is the time when I stop being a parent, I am just me. This is my time".*

\*\*\*

**Avz:** *"listen, I come home late in the evening, at these hours I expect a little quiet, I don't have patience or strength for arguments... I need my quiet time alone"*

For others, the distancing was a result of the difficulty of having any real conversation, and the need to "milk" the teenagers in order to receive answers containing more than one syllable. Parents shared that talking with their teenagers became awkward, difficult up to the point of impossible, since most of the time they choose to be in their room on their own or hanging out with friends. When they finally responded to their parents' investigations, it was usually with short answers, the message being – 'leave me alone'. Parents experience such responses as a rejection or even an insult, making them withdraw, and in time, stop trying to communicate. In worse cases, parents admit that sometimes, on the rare occasions when the teenager is trying to initiate a conversation, they find themselves reacting in the same abrupt way as the teenager, because they feel insulted, seek retribution, or "try to teach them a lesson".

The thought of having to relate to embarrassing questions posed by the teenagers was also a cause for concern for many parents. Needless to say that the most embarrassing issues are the ones that are of greatest interest to the adolescent and include topics concerning sexuality, finding their sexual orientation, drinking alcohol, finding relationships, and so on. Sometimes it appears as if parents would rather avoid communication altogether than walk into any of those "traps". In one of the conversations where the issue of sexuality among teenagers came up, one of the fathers became very upset and reacted severely:

**Avz:** *"I don't want him to talk to me about those things!!!"*

**Interviewer:** *"who do you want him to talk too? Where would he get reliable information?"*

**Avz:** *"I just don't want to talk to him about such things, I don't have too, I'm not his friend, and he should talk to his friends about such issues...learn from them"*

Another question dealt with the way in which discourse with teenagers is divided in most families, where the mother is traditionally entrusted with role of the "talker" or the "investigator". Parents were asked if they felt free to talk

to their children about everything. The parents' answers clearly demonstrated differences between mothers and fathers regarding open discourse. Contrary to the fathers, the majority of the mothers felt they could talk to their teenagers about everything. Usually, the mother is more available to communicate with teenagers, for various reasons - shorter working hours, more time at home or by nature of what is perceived to be the typical mother-child connection. Ultimately the information the mother receives from her teenager, is passed on (though sometimes only partially) to the father, which allows him to feel a part of the conversation cycle.

With most fathers, it was fairly easy to identify the convenience of such a communication structure, where they are freed from the responsibility of initiating spending time with their teenagers either talking or engaging in other kinds of joint activities. After a deeper discussion, where parents were urged to be completely honest regarding their interest in any change in that matter, most of the fathers expressed their reluctance to making any changes, they were happy with the status quo.

Admitting this, especially in front of their spouse, was not an easy thing to do and takes courage and honesty, which I have found in the participating fathers, as is well illustrated in this piece of conversation:

**Interviewer:** *"would you like your children to see you as a figure to talk to, about everything...?"*

**Ar:** *"first of all, Mi (his wife) is in the front, she is the one they talk to, maybe because she is more sensitive"*

**Interviewer:** *"why? Because she is a woman?"*

**Ar:** *"no...it's a personality issue"*

**Interviewer:** *"are you ok with that, or would you like to change it?"*

**Ar:** *"maybe a little...I would like to speak openly to the girls... to tell you the truth, I don't know how to...I'm not so sure that it's possible to change it at all"*

**Interviewer:** *"what if I tell you it is possible?"*

**Ar:** *"to be honest, I'm not sure I want to make the effort, it looks like a lot of investment"*

This topic of initiative, participating and active parenting came up throughout the coaching sessions several times. On the one hand, some parents, being truthful, admitted that if they had not come upon the option to participate in this study, they probably would not have initiated looking for any professional guidance. On the other hand, I cannot ignore the fact that parents' willingness to participate in the study, resulted from their understanding that there are some difficulties in the communication with their teenagers.

*Si: the mere fact we came to you, and I told you that one of my three children at home is...I do not get along very well with him. I can't recruit myself to be available to him...I feel something is "rotten"...something bad is happening and I'm lost. I think this is one of the hardest choices I ever made, to seek a person like you and tell them (...) I think a good mom needs to know when she causes damage*

The decision to turn to professional help is not a simple one to make, since it confronts parents with reality, and forces them to face less pleasant aspects of themselves as individuals and parents. Once they made the decision to participate in the study (and thus participate in all coaching sessions, answer questionnaires and do homework), a task that required the investment of time and emotional resources, they encountered additional levels of coping.

The active participation required in the sessions, demanded of the parents to closely observe and reflect upon themselves, scrutinize the choices that they made, and to pay attention to the way that they behave, speak, and act as individuals and as parents.

One of the main insights that were unveiled through this process is that conscious and active parenthood requires a greater investment of time, emotions, conversations, initiation and willingness to change resources, often at the cost of personal convenience. While this form of parenthood has the potential to aid and improve the communication and the relationships with teenagers it is doubtlessly a much more demanding, vigorous parenting style, which usually involves leaving one's comfort zone.

At this point, the parents tried to find ways to improve their relationships with their teenagers, now understanding and relating to the fact that the teenagers have special needs for connection and communication, which are different from their own needs. They had to examine the degree of their willingness, ability and interest to be a part of their teenagers' worlds; what are they willing to do in order to create shared worlds; and what is possible for them to change in their daily behavior, in order to achieve all that.

#### **c.4. Implementation of Pro-activism**

Comprehending the importance of fulfilling the parental role from a conscious place, which requires taking responsibility, parents came up with a number of ideas for becoming active parents:

- All parents agreed that a pre-condition, is the willingness to live in a state of awareness, both on an individual and on a parental level. To fully recognize and understand the obvious and concealed motives that inspire them to act the way they do. To recognize the critical thinking behind any decision: A sincere, bold and courageous awareness.
- A part of being a conscious parent is the readiness to discern whether an honest motivation to make necessary changes really exists. Parents described situations in which on a declarative level, they stated their interest in making changes. However, after deeper and a more honest examination, they realized that they are content inside their comfort zone, not genuinely interested in change and reluctant to make any effort in order to achieve change.
- Additional insight collected during the sessions was the profound understanding that it is solely the parents' responsibility to create any improvement in communication with teenagers.

***Etz:** "my main insight from the sessions is that whatever happens with the kids mostly depends on us (...) I kept saying all the time, it's his fault, it's their fault, when actually it's us. All depends on what we say and do.*

One of the suggested ways to implement this responsibility is by designating personal time for each child (teenager or younger), untainted time – free of interruptions, phones, chores etc., a time of full parental devotion and attentiveness toward the teenager.

**Additional other ways parents suggested were:**

- Initiate joint activities
- Include teens in daily and routine matters
- Be able to listen without offering advice
- Accept teenagers' different views and opinions

#### **D. Fourth Theme - differences between mothers and fathers**

"God could not be everywhere and therefore he made mothers".

*Jewish Folk phrase*

##### **Introduction**

Throughout human history, motherhood has been perceived by international consensus as the most significant force in child raising.

Mother figures vary according to the cultural context and yet remain a central figure in showing compassion, tenderness and emotions. The mother is the one to reflect expectations, yearning, needs and unfulfilled wishes and at the same time is subjected to feelings of disappointment, hostility, anger and aggression.

The image of fathers, in comparison to that of mothers, seems to be vaguer; however, this is a gross generalization. The mother's image is attributed with features such as empathy, intimacy and understanding, as well as intuition, collaboration and emotional involvement in the child's experience. Mercy, compassion and containment are generally considered motherly and feminine traits, whereas cognitive, pragmatic analysis and assertiveness are thought of as fatherly and masculine attributes.

Without any doubt, through the twentieth century and beyond, into the new millennium, there is a definite movement and shift in this traditional role distribution and gender typecasting, partly due to continuous social changes throughout the world, as described in the section on post-modernist parenthood on p. 38.

Still, In Western society (USA, Australia, Western Europe), including the State of Israel, even in households where both parents are fully employed outside, most of the housekeeping, childcare and education, are still the mother's responsibility and obligation.

Regardless of the mentioned societal changes, mothers are still the ones to experience greater difficulty and stress regarding the tension between home and career (Hill et al., 2003).



Therefore, most workplaces focused on creating solutions designed for mothers, when trying to create appropriate bridging strategies between house needs to workplace needs:

*"As a result, corporations have focused primarily on meeting the needs of working mothers and have assumed that working fathers can fend for themselves" (Hill et al., 2003:241).*

#### **D.1. Mothers' versus Fathers' Roles in this Research**

Still at the recruiting stage, before commencing the coaching work with the parents, considerable differences were noticed, regarding the manner in which the mothers and fathers approached the need for self-assessment and individual work. Participation in this study, which was in fact also a way for seeking professional help, was completely upon the mothers' initiative, whereas fathers were willing to give their "consent" mainly due to massive pressure from their spouses. As well described in Niec (2015:232);

*"It has been suggested that fathers may attend treatment more frequently to support mothers, rather than to address their own parenting"...*

One of the more commonly repeated expressions I heard during the first few sessions with all couples was – *"I'm here because of my wife"*.

Studies examining father's participation and involvement in parental consultation and guidance programs, revealed some differences which characterize the relatively low interest that fathers showed towards such programs, and are therefore less committed (Niec et al., 2015:231):

*"Fathers have substantially lower rates of participation in behavioral parent training for child conduct problems than mothers (...) In fact, multiple reviews of BPT literature have consistently found that fathers are not included in the studies or are left out of the analyses."*

According to Niec (2015:231) mothers show greater willingness to make behavioral changes in their parental conduct if they are situated in stages 3 and 4 (elaborated on p. 167) of the change cycle, while fathers remain in the first

stage, indicating that they are pondering as to whether change is really necessary at all.

*"As expected, mothers and fathers differed significantly in their readiness to change their parenting."*

It seemed mothers are more aware of the emotional rather than merely technical relations that are developed with teenagers. They are the first to notice new challenges encountered in these relations and are willing to admit to themselves and others any mishaps or difficulties with communication. One way to explain these differences could be that mothers spend more time at home, return home earlier, and generally are more accessible, available and attentive to their children.

**Si:** *"I'm very containing...a good listener...I love them...even totally. I'll be there for them...they know, no matter what, good or bad, I'll be there even if it's the worst thing they tell me I'll be there always. I will never turn my back on them or get mad if it is not...I will be there, to understand, to hear to react...always. They know, no matter what, and they can tell me terrible things but I will still be there"*

In all the families that participated in the study, both parents confirmed that they keep the traditional structure of maternal/paternal general role distribution, which was common and familiar to them from their own childhood families. Another possible explanation could be that mothers willingly chose to be more involved and meaningful in their children's lives as truthfully stated by one of the participating mothers:

**Si:** *"Look, there is nothing to be done about it. I am very dominant (as a mother) and I know that. I know that and it is harder for me to give this spot up. I'm aware of that since I'm so dominant and have to be there, I'm not even sure that it's conscious".*

No doubt, this maternal choice stems to a great extent, from traditional socialization purporting strict division of the mother's roles and duties, however this is not the focus of this research.

Following this traditional gender division, it is quite clear "who does what" regarding the children. Mothers communicate more (at any age), are more involved in children's daily routines and whereabouts, function as the "attentive

ear" when support, advice and sympathy are needed, and they are there to help with homework and other studying tasks. In addition, usually mothers are the main contact person for any emergency, sickness or other problems occurring during school hours. In general, mothers spend more time with their children and are closer to them. Very often, they will pass on a brief and processed report to the fathers, usually after having solved and taken care of the crises. Many fathers prefer to receive a short, censored version of their children's state of affairs.

Fathers on the other hand, as they present themselves, work long hours (usually claiming to need to make a good living), arrive home late in the evenings, exhausted from a long day, typically preferring short contact with the children in order to make sure "all is fine", and then demand some quiet time and space for themselves.

Most fathers admitted to using pragmatic, short, informative and less emotional communication with their teenagers, as reflected in Eti's description of how she experiences their household (turning to her husband):

**Eti:** *"You ask general questions like - how was your day at school? It sounds like someone who does not really care (...) a question that you don't really want to have answered (...) I think they (the girls) have some kind of obstacle approaching him, an existing gap..."*

During sessions with the parents, traditional stereotypical gender statements often arose, referring to mothers' high emotional abilities, the assumption that it is "natural" for children to communicate more easily with their mothers and to the "fact" that mothers are more affectionate by nature. Fathers were brave to admit their reluctance to develop and invest in close emotional relationships with teenagers.

**Hez:** *"...my parenting? As we said, I am not very open, not sharing...and many times impatient. (...) If I approach one of my kids after two-three days we did not have a chance to speak, (...) she does not know anything about it (...) I tell them not to tell mom. I give them a hundred shekels bill...and they go "Oh daddy"...I sit with them for a few moments to clear my conscience."*

*Si – turning to her husband in a scolding tone: "...when was the last time in the last few years that you "actually" saw her; sat down, talked or listened to her. Not on a Friday night when we are all together... just you and her? (...) I see a lot of father-daughter connection, and this is something that I as a mother can never have with her (...) and it's a very special bond, I see it with many fathers and daughters her age...I am telling him that he misses her...he doesn't have that with her. I do have that with her. She and I are very close and she opens up to me and shares things with me. However, she does not share anything with him; she cannot open up to him. He needs to ask me many things about her...I tell him - don't ask me, I want you to be with her even more than you are with me, I want her to be able to ask him things that he might know and show her as a man, that I, being a woman, can't see".*

Fathers and mothers were equal partners during the coaching process, since the attendance of both parents was a pre-condition for participating in the research. In addition to partaking in the coaching sessions, they were also asked to carry out exercises and tasks, both individually and as a couple. Generally speaking, mothers took the assignments (in sessions or as homework) more seriously than the fathers and were more involved and invested accordingly. They usually fully completed the tasks, and even took on extra responsibility in making sure that the fathers fulfilled their part as well. In addition to the mothers feeling more confident about being able to change, their recognition of and belief in the need for improving their parenting skills might account for the differences between them and the fathers in approaching the assignments.

*"Mothers reported more motivation to change their parenting, felt more capable of changing, and placed more importance on treatment, while fathers were more defensive about the need for treatment" (Niec et al., 2015:232).*

As noted before, mothers as well as fathers were asked to choose their core values, map barriers and define the main issues they would like to work on regarding communication with their teenagers.

When analyzing the selected issues parents chose to change, there were no significant differences between the fathers and mothers. One noticeable difference could be found with regard to selected values - most mothers (five

out of seven) chose **familyism** as a core value, as opposed to only two fathers. Most fathers (six out of seven), chose **trust** as a core value in contrast to the mothers, where this was not chosen by any of them.

With regard to other methods used during the coaching process, no remarkable differences were observed. However, significant differences were noted within the dynamic discussion that developed during the sessions, where traditional gender-related views and perceptions of roles and typical characteristics became apparent, and discussion revolved around how all these affect and shape communication patterns with teenagers.

When assessing the changes in communication with teenagers upon completion of the coaching process, it was interesting to discern the differences between mothers and fathers regarding the way in which each perceived change. Many fathers reported noticing a great change for the better with their teenagers, possibly due to the fact that their connection with them, was in a worse condition from the start.

**To summarize**, it appears that the major differences between mothers and fathers, is derived from the different levels of willingness and motivation to take an honest look at themselves when defining a coherent set of values, beliefs and priorities. Only then, was it possible to examine the patterns in their connections with their teenagers, which led to the realization that there was a need for change in order to improve communication, relations and atmosphere. It seems that mothers were more courageous in looking boldly into their parenting patterns. They fearlessly recognized the existence of difficulties, explored ways for improvement, and eventually took active measures in order to implement the necessary change. Fathers, who on the surface level seemed less eager and somewhat reluctant to take an active part in the processes of consultation, training or guidance regarding their parenting skills, underwent an interesting transformation. As time went by, and the coaching sessions advanced, I could feel the growing readiness of fathers to let go of misconceptions regarding gender issues, and to open up to the higher level of emotional discourse inherent to such a process.

## **E. Fifth Theme – Change**

### **Introduction**

This study aimed to give parents the opportunity for a personal rendezvous with themselves, an option for self-examination and inner discussion about personal, sensitive and concealed issues. A major topic for discussion and introspection had to do with identifying the barriers, which prevent them from being who they wished to be and expected to become, as well as naming their special and unique abilities as individuals and parents.

As elaborated previously, couples deciding to get married and have a family, usually discuss trivial matters, rather than look into fundamental issues regarding parenthood, such as their parental agenda, values and beliefs according to which they would want to raise their children. As cited many times, parenthood is considered by many, to be an intuitive and inherent human ability, passed on naturally through the generations. Consequently, parents tend to follow their own parents' model, and raise their children the same way that they were raised themselves.

Most parents do not devote a great deal of thought or discussion to one of the most significant issues in their shared lives. This is not for lack of care or apathy, but merely because of the assumption that becoming a parent is a natural quality embedded in each one of us, from the very moment we decide to have children.

### **E.1. What is Change? Steps towards planned change**

The main question of this study was concerned with the way in which the parents' encounter with themselves as individuals, might influence (change, improve or even harm) communication patterns that they have with their teenagers.

This study focuses on the 'change' process, throughout all its stages. A shift from discontent with the current situation, to realizing that other options exist. Followed by compliance to making concessions, including painful ones, in order

to achieve change. Then choosing an alternative path of behavior to follow, being patient until change becomes permanent, and finally keeping and preserving the change over time.

Individual change is a widely discussed subject in social science; one that has been vastly researched and investigated from many aspects. As such, there are many theories and models dealing with identification, determination and classification, which motivate people to make changes, as well as the range of different stages, which delineate the process of change.

Change theories, in general, discuss several main reasons, which motivate people to change different elements in their lives, personalities and behaviors.

Kottler (2014) argued that the “average” person would avoid making changes, unless one of the following conditions took place:

- Transition in life (natural developmental processes such as bearing children)
- Boredom
- Something needed to be fixed
- Awards promised
- Existence of a Crisis

He also described the typical sequence of change: stimulation for change (due to one of the reasons listed above); a sense of discomfort or pain from the existing situation that can't be ignored; comprehending that something needs to change; planning and preparing concrete action; recovery time from inevitable mishaps in the change process.

Riva (2016) presented a new approach to change theories, by which change is always contextual (depends on the person, matter and situation); a person could simultaneously be both the motive and the barrier for creating change; *change is always a process following crisis or other transformations in life.*

Planned change usually derives from the operational steps taken by a person in order to reach the desired goal as stated by Evans (2013:65):

*"A measurable goal allows for the establishment of concrete steps toward it—indicators that you are on an appropriate pathway".*

An additional model, based on Cognitive Psychology, is PCT = Perceptual Control Theory, which assumes that a core need in human beings is to be in control, which is basically the processes of reducing the gap between what is wanted and what exists, between objectives and reality. The model assumes that when a person becomes aware of this gap, which leads to a state of conflict, the individual will take practical measures in order to diminish the level of conflict and reach a more desirable state instead (Inghilleri et al., 2014).

One of the early models from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which tried to explain the processes of change, was developed by Prochaska (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1982); Prochaska and Velicer (1997) and is still highly recognized. This is the TTC model - Trans Theoretical Model of Behavior Change, and primarily describes six practical stages in any change process:

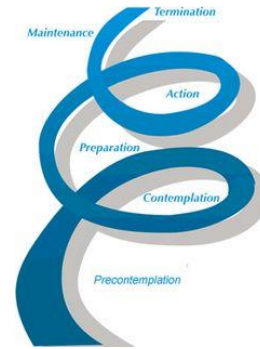
*"...change involves progress through six stages of change: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination" (Prochaska 1997:38).*

According to this model, the fact that parents initiated actual action and chose to join the study and the coaching process, translate as stages three and four. Yet the question regarding their motives for participation remains.

- Stage 3 - "Preparation is the stage in which people are intending to take action in the immediate future... These individuals have a plan of action, such as joining a health education class, consulting a counselor...."
- Stage 4 - "Action is the stage in which people have made specific overt modifications in their life styles within the past 6 months. Since action is observable, behavior change often has been equated with action"(Prochaska, 1997:39).



Evidently, this is not a linear, uniform or consecutive process, but rather a 'spiral' one, that moves back and forth in parallel. During the coaching process, the dynamic of change processes was clearly observed. It became evident in cases where the parents had recognized and understood behaviors that do not promote good communication with the teenagers, they promised to themselves, not to repeat those mistakes. Yet still parents arrived at the next weekly session feeling ashamed, embarrassed, and disappointed in themselves for failing, and having made the same mistakes all over again.



**Ed:** *"...from time to time there are "bumpers" and mistakes by reacting incorrectly, ...or even the smallest thing makes you lose control all over again, as if you have missed that split second to think..."*

## **E.2. "Why Change?" Reasons to participate in the coaching process**

As noted previously, the essence of the study was based on a comprehensive coaching process that included ten sessions for the parents. The fundamental nature of coaching deals with change, as presented in the book "Co-Active Coaching" (Kimsey-House et al., 2010:1) as a central saying:

*"People come to coaching for various and different reasons, but the bottom line is the willingness for change".*

Throughout the research process and my sessions with the parents, I was wondering what were the reasons that motivated them to "take action" and enter into a long and demanding coaching process. What were the objectives that they were looking to fulfill through this process? Was there really a genuine desire for change at the base of their willingness to participate in the research, or were there other reasons? During the sessions, different reasons revealed themselves, which parents defined as the motivation to participate, some of which I detected on my own and kept to myself, others I received as answers and support from the parents, and the rest remained a mystery. These are the main motivations I explored within myself and with the participating parents:

- Readiness to enter the process as a result of the fact that parents identify behaviors, statements, paradigms and thoughts in themselves, which they consider too disruptive, irritating or inhibiting for them.
- Understanding and recognizing that parental behaviors that were appropriate and right up until that point in time, while their children were younger, were no longer suitable to the new developing needs of teenagers.
- The wish for a change derived from looking around - friends, neighbours or family, or from appreciating more distant models such as those found in the movies. All these models presented other options for relationship patterns for communicating with teenagers; close and intimate relations, open and respectful communication, better atmosphere, as we tend to think that “the grass is greener on the other side”. One of the participants continuously remarked during sessions that she had always thought that only her children were problematic, while everywhere else, children were perfect...

*Li: "I always thought that my children are the worst, terrible, not educated. He (her husband) always felt that, that's why he came here to understand they are not that awful. I keep telling him, our children are fine, just like all other children around us"*

- The need for change comes up when parents realize that their status as parents changes; their influence, control and position has changed as their children become teenagers. Through adolescence, parental status decreases constantly, a position that once was the center of the children's world, declines gradually. Instead, parallel processes of losing meaning and losing control take place. Parents usually have extreme reactions to these changes – some turn rigid, inflexible and strict, while others understand the need for change, hence, become more flexible and adjust and expand boundaries accordingly. Some totally give up any attempt to communicate with their teenagers and give them total freedom, as specified in the major four parental styles on p. 16-17.

- Initiative and readiness to participate in a coaching process, as a result of recognizing present reality, where parents seek help from professionals such as - consultants, therapists or coaches, became a common parental norm. It seemed that “learning how to become parents” (Smith & Pugh, 1996) is the current “Bon Ton”. Contemporary parents are busy learning about parenthood via programs promoting self-improvement and upgrading parenting skills, maybe as a result of the overall era of individualism which cherishes independence, awareness and empowerment.
- It is possible that the search for support and guidance is triggered by teenagers’ complaints regarding their parents poor parenting style. The motivation to seek change may be spurred by criticism and remarks coming from others outside the family, regarding deficiencies in parenting capabilities for coping with teenagers.
- Opportunism – the willingness to participate in the study is due to the fact that, an opportunity demanding hardly any special effort and is convenient and free of charge, came across as “if it doesn’t help it won’t hurt”...

Within the initial questionnaire completed by the parents prior to commencing with the coaching process, parents were asked about the things that they wanted to change or improve regarding their parenting style. The following quotations display their answers:

1. *"To be able to talk and discuss with them about their thoughts and things they go through. To have fun, laugh together, share enjoyable activities for all of us and be able to cooperate and contribute adequately at home"*
2. *"To know when to draw the lines, how to deal with moral dilemmas and when to get angry"*
3. *"Good connection, tools for coping with life"*
4. *"To equip and empower them for real life"*
5. *"More attentive and involved in their everyday life"*

6. *"Ability to freely communicate with the children, to naturally initiate occasional conversations"*
7. *"To be more patient and attentive, in sync to them in general, and especially to their needs. To spend more time with them alone and with the entire family"*
8. *"I would like to be more patient and attentive, to let go of the eagerness for excellence and my tendency to push them upwards. I want to be able to throw away the "bad cop" feeling..."*
9. *"To be together more"*
10. *"To learn how to listen and how to react – so he would tell and share things, without the force to "milk" him"*
11. *"Patience and authority"*
12. *"More of open communication from the girls"*
13. *"Better communication, better parenting – not a friend"*

In analyzing the parents' statements, one can find some prominent motivations for participating in this study; they divide into several groups of reasons:

1. The most salient motivation indicates the parents' wish to be a meaningful part in their teenagers' lives, and participate in their worlds, which exist outside parental presence and control. In sentences no. 1;3;5;6;7;9;12;13 the parents desire for connection and communication with their teenagers can be heard loud and clear. They are eager for a connection based on open, natural and smooth communication, one that derives from the teenagers' wish to involve their parents in their everyday life, but mostly in their emotional worlds.

Most parents admitted during the sessions, that they do not always know when and how to approach their teenagers and conduct a private conversation, mainly out of fear of rejection or dismissal with a one-syllable sentence.

2. Another pertinent issue that comes up in the parents' remarks can be found in sentences no. 5;6;7;8;9, and is the genuine wish to learn how

to honestly listen and be attentive to teenagers. It seems quite a few parents do not consider themselves good listeners, an ability, they recognize as crucial in establishing good, open and meaningful communication.

3. An additional explanation for the motivation to participate in the study is related to the way society defines the parental role, giving them the responsibility to raise children to become independent adults in society. In sentence no. 2;3;4, parents clearly voice their wish to equip their adolescents with the necessary skills and tools for a successful life, as clearly reflected in these lines:

*Mi: "I think a good parent is the one that gives a child love, tools for life. Tools for success, tool as to how to get along with other people"*

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*Ar: "it's my job to equip them with tools to deal for good and bad, tools to make the right decisions even when we are not there, mainly give them tools"*

It seems at times, that many parents feel that their major parental role is concluded, when their children have finished acquiring a set of skills and concrete tools that will enable them to lead a successful life. Many questions arise in relation to the "success" concept - what is success? Does it mean self-actualization of the teenagers' qualities? Is it considered as financial success, which would mean being able to provide for themselves honorably? Is it achieved when building a home and raising a family similar to the one that the teenager grew up in? Is the notion of success similar amongst parents and teenagers, considering the generation gap between parents aged 40-50 and their teenagers, who were born into the new millennium with all that this implies? The term "Succeeding in life" is important within every human context, certainly in the one of parents and teenagers, which is loaded with expectations, dreams and ambitions between them, however this was not the scope of this study. The concept of success, as recognized by parents in relation to their teenagers, and as perceived by the teenagers themselves, is worth further study

and could be assessed and developed through a continued/expanded coaching process.

Another explanation for parents' inclination to provide their children with "tools for life" is the thought that dealing with concrete, cognitive and instrumental needs is easier than trying to contain and fulfill emotional needs in this stormy, confused and fragile period of life. Possibly, parents find it easier to "hide" behind such statements than admitting to themselves or their teenagers, that there are times when they do not know how to understand or cope with the changes that teenagers are going through; they feel insecure about approaching, listening or expressing physical affection.

4. Parents were also motivated to participate, when they realized that certain behaviors and statements on their part were detrimental to their relationships and communication with their teenagers. In sentences no. 7; 8; 11; 13 parents honestly disclose their faults and shortcomings as human beings that prevent them from becoming the parents they wish to be. Throughout the coaching sessions, on many instances we encountered moments where parents met different aspects of themselves, some they liked and appreciated, others less flattering, which were perceived as obstacles on the way to achieving and fulfilling their best possible parenthood.

***Edu:** "I have learnt that apparently I love to be in control...I didn't think of myself that way, maybe I'm still denying it (...). That I am a little rigid, although I did not think of myself as such (...). it's not new, but I now understand more that I live with a feeling of disappointment, not only disappointment in the parenting role, but disappointment in general, from life..."*

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***Avz:** "I figured it out myself, the way, the place I want to be with my children, in one of the exercises you gave us, I realized where I really was. To tell you the truth, I slapped myself...I don't want to be in those places with my family, so I'm really trying"*

### **E.3. Things Parents want to Change**

As early as the first session, the question of “change” was put on the table. Parents were presented with a question - whether there were any issues, behaviors or feelings that they wished to examine and process. In addition, were there any specific and conscious topics where they want to initiate change? All participants said they would like to change something in themselves as individuals as well as parent, some wanted overall change and others just wanted to refine the edges. Therefore, it was important to assess carefully, exactly which changes parents were looking to create either in themselves or in their families- what is the “new place” they wish to find in themselves. It was a relatively easy question for all parents to answer, as individuals or as couples. They all knew that they wished to change “something” to become better people, and obviously, they all wanted to improve “something” in the connection that they had with their teenagers.

A significant part of the discussion regarding change required excavating the person’s motives for such wide-reaching change.

Parents raised distinct and concrete issues, which they hoped and aimed to modify, on the personal level – in the space within themselves, and on the parental and family level – in the space between parent and child.

Most issues raised by parents were somewhat similar, acceptable to most, and in part even predictable and natural; they were divided into three main groups:

1. **Things I want to reduce** – anger, anxiety and concern, judgment, control, prohibitions, remarks, reminders and over-protection.
2. **Things I want to increase** – enable autonomy, rely on, communicate and talk, listen and be sensitive.
3. **Things I want to learn** – how to create a sense of partnership, differentiate priorities and pick battles wisely, be creative and resourceful on how to equip them with important tools for coping with life.

Evidently some issues dealt with emotions, feelings and focus on a person's internal world, while others emphasize external behavioral expressions towards others such as anger, anxiety, concern, criticism, need for control, sensitivity or creativity.

Further issues reflect behavioral expressions that parents demonstrate towards their family and children, which result from their own personality – prohibitions, constant and repeated comments, over-protectiveness, attentiveness, ability to share and listen and the definition of boundaries.

Another segment handles positive aspects - parents' motivation to develop an aware parenting style within themselves. By discovering skills and tools obtained from experts, they are able to improve their parenthood while growing and developing personally.



#### **E.4. Change related Emotions**

Considering the difficulties that arose around recruiting parents to participate in the study, (although the coaching sessions were free of charge) it is safe to assume that parents tend to avoid entering processes which deal with examining their parenthood. On the declarative level, parents express their wish to learn, examine themselves and their parenting style wide open, in order to improve in both areas. In reality, a different voice made itself heard. Contrary to my expectation to be overwhelmed by the flood of parents wishing to take advantage of this unique opportunity and execute the wish for a meaningful process regarding their parenting skills, I was suddenly facing difficulties in locating participants. While trying to figure out the reasons for the difficulties in recruiting, I could think of only two possible explanations – one of them being a prosaic and straightforward laziness and secondly the wish to stay inside the comfort zone. It comes out very clearly in the personal barrier analysis on pg. 138, similar to what Evans (2013:245) says:

*"...for all the reasons we have already examined around cognitive flexibility, resistance, or fear of change. Almost by definition planned for change — therapy — takes people outside their comfort zone."*

In the barrier analysis, we witness that being addicted to the "comfort zone" is one of the main barriers impeding parents to change.

The second explanation, which could enlighten the first one as well, is parents' fear of "standing trial". It seems that parents avoid collaboration with what is perceived as an intervention in their lives and the way they raise their children. To say the least, people do not like to "face themselves in the mirror" to take an objective look at themselves and confront their less favorable sides. They prefer to avoid frustration, disappointment, hardship and pain, especially if there is no acute reason to take such a journey. Hence, they would rather not examine or deal with their own parenting style; are not interested in any exterior evaluation to dig, intervene, criticize or judge their lives or the relationships that they conduct with their teenagers.

*Edu: "it takes guts, and probably, that is what stops me. It is very likely that despite the fact I am aware that I'm not in the places I would like to be with my family, because it is the convenient and familiar place, I accept it...and the price? I'm willing to pay"*

Apparently, it looks like many parents prefer to keep on managing their parenting on "automatic pilot" and keep avoiding meeting painful, unpleasant and unflattering sides within themselves and their parenting style. Parts of these behaviors are very well known in psychology, where avoiding or rejecting treatment is common.

Early on, at the very beginning of my study, I assumed that my offer, to participate in a coaching process at no cost, would launch many applications, especially since it was not "Psychological therapy" with all its implications. The advertisement inviting parents to join the study specifically stated that this coaching process is intended for parents who are presently raising teenagers, thus it was clear that the general subject was parenthood. After working with parents for many years, witnessing their constant wish for help, training, coaching and advice, I assumed parents would "jump at the opportunity".

During the research, I was frequently wondering how genuine and authentic the parental claim of "wanting to change" is. Is it merely a statement aiming to satisfy the super-ego – the perception of the "ideal me"? Is it the wish to be looked upon as "invested parents", a part of the general orientation of looking at parenthood as a profession which needs to constantly be learned and developed (Smith & Pugh, 1996).

I was also wondering to what extent parents would be willing to confront their own personality and behavioral issues. Will they be ready to convert newly acquired insights into actual operational actions, which mean abandoning certain unsuitable behaviors, and adopting new ways of operating? Unfortunately, I did not get answers to all my questions, some questions cannot be answered at all. Part of the answers are extracted from the parents' statements throughout the coaching process and after a few months of recess. My inclination is to believe that parents were sincere when seeking

improvement and change. I also believe their reports regarding the process that they personally experienced, and their changing connection with their teenagers, were both honest and genuine.

Evans (2013), in his book "How and Why People Change", he argues that change processes usually evoke excessive emotions, even in cases when change is pre-planned, derives from the person's own free will and choice, and the advantages of change are clear:

*"This should come as no real surprise. Everything we do as human beings, even the things we do not like about ourselves, we do for a reason. To change that pattern and do something else is fundamentally difficult, especially if that something else is completely new and different and thus daunting" (Evans, 2013:55).*

The Motivational theory approach claims that a person could be ambivalent regarding the change process – on one hand, one might understand the necessity of it, and be interested in pursuing it; on the other hand, the person might feel repelled and will then avoid doing it using various excuses (Miller & Rose, 2009). Oreg (2008), in his studies on Resistance to Change (RTC) he suggests the following typology to better comprehend this resistance, and presents four dimensions: Routine seeking; Emotional reaction; Short-term focus and Cognitive rigidity

In the study conducted by him, during which resisting change was investigated in 17 countries, findings showed that meanings and motivations regarding change were similar among these various cultures.

In his book, "The Psychology of Resistance to Change, Fox (1999) he describes 21 known reasons that people have for resisting change (personal and organizational changes). In general, they can be divided into two main groups of resistances – the kind that derives from opposing the fundamental nature of change versus the kind that derives from resisting related processes to the change namely, rejecting the change and the change agents themselves (Fox, 1999:239). Family therapy and Psychology analyze resistance to change as the unwillingness or inability to accept inappropriate behaviors within oneself or in

a family member. Thus, active participation in the change process could be interpreted as being part of the problem itself. A clear and well-known cause for change resistance comes from fearing that any intervention of emotional and behavioral change might undermine stances, values, self-images and self-identity, which a person has built for years. During this research, parents raised a genuine fear that by admitting the need for change, the hidden meaning is that they functioned poorly as parents so far, a threatening and humbling conclusion.

Additional understandable and known reasons to resist change are the fear of new and unfamiliar paths, and what they might bring along, as **Edu** clearly shares:

**Edu:** *This is my comfort zone. Maybe I am scared to take risks...call it risks. Maybe I am afraid to take any steps*

**Interviewer:** *Changes*

**Edu:** *changes, of course. I am afraid*

**Interviewer:** *what needs to happen for you to overcome this barrier of fear?*

**Edu:** *I think the only thing that could happen, is if I will stand on the edge and I will get pushed (...) Only if someone pushes me, I believe only once I fall I'll start somewhere at the bottom and slowly climb up*

Eventually, one of the main reasons to resist change and changing, results prosaically from excuses as addiction to comfort, laziness and lack of interest.

**Hez:** *"I think that the thing that summarizes everything is laziness, not just physical laziness but rather moral laziness (...) lets postpone it for tomorrow"*

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**Etz:** *"...many times when I return home from work, I have no energies, I function on an automatic mode, I fold the laundry, I do whatever is needed, but my head is...and I think to myself – great they have friends or they are busy, and I can stay inside myself"*

### **E.5. Field Reports – achieving the wish for change**

Regardless of everything said above - expected and unexpected difficulties, complicated recruitment, parents' resistance to change etc., during the working

period (i.e. coaching sessions) some of the parents came forward and shared anecdotes of many incidents where they could feel that change was actually happening. Change began with the feeling of some parents that something small was changing – they took an additional moment to think before reacting - a quick halt before responding to their teenagers, something inhibited them from falling into old habits, before rushing to get angry/be disappointed/get hurt or yell.

**Interviewer:** *"what do you think changed the most?"*

**Ed:** *"the speed of reaction."*

**Interviewer:** *"do you mean you think before speaking?"*

**Ed:** *"absolutely. I opened my head to other possible reactions, if I use to say no or get angry, or only see things my way, nowadays it's not like that anymore (...) now, in many cases, I breathe before reacting, and it really changes everything..."*

This was actually the beginning of creating and developing conscious parenting. At the beginning, it was the self-awareness of each parent as individuals, and later on, of the way they comprehend, perceive and accept themselves as parents.

Change occurs on multiple layers – and was expressed in words and patterns of discussion and communication that they chose to conduct with their teenagers. It could also be detected in their willingness to listen, see and respect the teenagers' different points of view, and in their growing commitment to act differently than in past routines. As a whole, parents described a different atmosphere at home than usual - calm, pleasant, sharing and more flexible. Mo shared with enthusiasm and excitement the clear wish of their adolescent son to be hugged, with him being the one to initiate it constituting a dramatic change and causing total surprise.

**Mo:** *there are many kisses and hugs that weren't there before (...) its physical (...) it comes from him (...) even towards me...he comes to me every moment asking for a hug before bed time...In the past I had to force myself on him*

Li described a recent vacation where her older son decided to join and was very close and affectionate, a great change on his part:

*Li: "it was so fun, he (the older son) came with us, he was actually with us, and then we went to the pool, he came to sit next to me, on his own!! I didn't even ask. I put my hand on his leg and started caressing him, and he didn't move my hand!! He enjoyed it, when I stopped for a minute, he took my hand and put it back on his leg again, I was hesitating, it took time till I understood he is looking for it... then my other son comes looking for my caressing. So here I am, with both my sons, one at each side and each of my hands are caressing them..."*

The question regarding the manner in which parents talked to their teenagers, expressed themselves differently and thought prior to speaking, showed how the majority of parents had become much more aware and careful when choosing appropriate words, and general conversation style when talking to their teenagers. They paid much closer attention to their tone of voice, sarcasm, and the kind of discourse that was mainly about giving orders, using demeaning phrases or commenting constantly about every little thing; these were all subjects that were discussed throughout the coaching sessions.

#### **E.6. Sustaining the Change**

In the final interview conducted with parents a few months after finishing the coaching session, parents were asked to retrospectively examine the past few months in order to answer a few final questions.

- Did they recognize any changes in their parenting style, in a way that affected communication with their teenagers?
- If their reply was positive, I asked about the essence of those changes and how they manifested themselves in their daily routine
- Moreover, do they feel that they are able keep to the changes that they had accomplished during the coaching period?
- In their opinion, what had made these changes possible? If they did not observe any changes, what prevented them from happening, why did they feel that they had fallen back into old habits?
- Did they observe any changes in their teenager's attitude or behavior, and if so, what were they?

**All** the participating parents, talked about observed changes that occurred in their homes, during the coaching sessions and after them, emphasizing how a substantial amount of those changes were still lasting, five months after completing the coaching process. Some of the parents talked about very significant changes, the kind that made it possible to reconnect with their teenagers, after having felt that this connection had "dissolved" in the last couple of years. It was best described by Li, who kept saying:

*"I feel like Omer, my son, has come back to me".*

On the other hand, there were some parents, who honestly admitted that they were slowly losing their ability to persist and maintain the new awareness and alternative behaviors. Despite recognizing the importance of these new skills, they claimed that when there is no framework supporting them, they are missing the "anchor" that helps sustain the achieved changes and continue the momentum.

**Avz:** *"we definitely managed to change, but in order to really make a difference, you have to have persistence. This is the operative word – persistence, if you persist, then you succeed, if you don't, change will never happen. Let's say, we need a figure like you to help us stay on track. The framework of the coaching sessions gave us an anchor, a certain stability factor to the process, an obligation, commitment (...) once the obligation was gone... I can't say we threw everything away, but... I can safely say there was a nice change at least 35% improvement"*

Parents talked about having a more relaxed relationship with their teenagers, higher levels of sharing and a greater will on the teenager's part, to communicate with their parents. They stressed that one major insight that they learnt during the sessions, was that in order to have their teenager confide in and share personal things with them, it was essential for the parents to share some elements from their daily routine with the teenagers as well. They were satisfied to report that they found themselves returning home at the end of the day, telling their teenagers more and more about their day at work and life in general, which the teenagers appeared to enjoy. Furthermore, they designated special time to spend with the children with no distractions, like going out to

eat, watching a movie or seeing a show, and even a trip abroad. All these efforts were done with the intention of cultivating a close, intimate and sharing relationship with their teenagers, one that would make them feel important, seen and contained. For families with more than one child, it is obviously not a simple task to find space for this in their hectic, dynamic and overloaded lives. Parents were observant enough to realize that sometimes teenagers are not interested in spending time "one on one" with them, but they certainly like to be asked.

Clearly, some teenagers (the younger ones) really liked this parental initiation while others were very busy in their own worlds and within their peer groups, so their need for designated time with parents was smaller. Parents were glad to report that the amount of frictions, arguments & disagreements had gone down significantly. This was mainly due to their own understanding that not every issue was worth fighting over. Parents stated they carefully chose which issues to insist upon, while being aware of the list of core values that they had assembled as individuals as well as parents.

Additional change, which results from the new behaviors specified above, has to do with the general atmosphere at home. Parents described an overall experience of less yelling, anger or tension; they were willing to let go of automatic refusals and were ready to examine things from the teenagers' point of view. Mainly, parents were willing to accept that there is more than one way to look at and do things.

**Ed:** *"I have learnt that there is more than one way to look at things, other ways that might even be better than mine...and I always thought my way is the best. I found that other ways may bring the same result but the way will be calmer, easier, and considerate for others..."*

*Interviewer: does this serve you in other places beside parenthood?*

**Ed:** *"yes. At work. Clearly. I used to be much more aggressive."*

Other parents shared, that the new acquired skills had enabled them to know where and how to set limits, differentiate between manipulations and real



needs, and be able to stand firm with their decisions, by facing teenagers who were used to "having things their own way". From the teenagers' point of view, living conditions had worsened, to them "mom has gone bad". One of the mothers described her son's reaction when he realized she was going for another coaching session:

*Si: "I told him that today we have a visitor, he wanted to know who it is, so I said it is our coach, so he says – the one that made you change so much... so I asked – how have I changed? He said – you became meaner (...) stricter... I think he was trying to say he can't get away with certain things anymore"*

Quite a few questions regarding 'connection' with teenagers were asked in the post coaching process questionnaire. The following table shows some prominent examples of questions that try to grasp indications for felt changes according to the parents.

Table presenting data from parents Questionnaire post coaching sessions – change

Questionnaire Questions	very large extant	large extant	medium extant	small extant	Not at all
33. To what extent (if any) do you feel your relationships with your teenagers have changed for the better lately?	5 parents	4 parents	5 parents		
36. To what extent was there any improvements in communication with your teenagers?	1 parent	7 parents	6 parents		
39. To what extent do you pay attention to the things you say to them and the language you choose in communicating with your teenagers?	4 parents	9 parents			1 parent
43. To what extent do you feel the general atmosphere in the house is more relaxed?	10 parents	2 parents	2 parents		

As easily demonstrated, by question no.33 we can see that all parents felt that their relationships with their teenagers were changed for the better on different levels – ranging from some change to a significant change.

The sample of questions presented, was aimed to specify and demonstrate some reported changes. It is a small sample of a much longer questionnaire, yet these questions give a good feel of what parents felt, said during the sessions, and answered on the questionnaires, in regard to change.

The logic behind this selection of question, is that they give a global overview of parents' teenagers' relationship that deal with general issues such as connection, communication, discourse style, acceptance and atmosphere. Combining the data from these questions along with parents' quotations regarding change as presented on sections E5 + E6 + E7 p. 179-188, allows a wide view of the issue and helps to answer the research question.

According to these answers and quotations, we can understand that most parents felt that connection, communication and discourse style with teenagers, is better, and the general atmosphere was extensively improved.

Another interesting example is question no. 16 - **To what extent do you accept your teenager's decisions if they are against your opinion?**

Before the coaching sessions, eleven parents stated they accept their teenagers decisions against their opinion, to a medium extent and only three parents said they accept the decisions to a large extent.

After the coaching sessions, there was a turn around in the parents' answers – eleven parents said they accept the teenagers decisions to a large extent, and only three parents said they accept teenagers' decisions to a medium extent.

One can assume that parents' positive reports in regard to felt changes in relations, might derive from a few irrelevant reasons such as – trying to please the researcher, much effort and time invested on their part to admit it had no influence, or that during the process (coaching sessions + questionnaires) there was no room to admit negative feelings, or be completely honest. It is possible to address these issues from different angles – there were seven families that participated in the research, hence fourteen parents. It seems quite impossible that not even one of them felt it was possible to admit that there was little to no change at all. The fact is that indeed all of them felt a change for the better,

but not on the same level. Over a third of the participating parents (five parents) felt a change only on a medium level. A good example of a question that demonstrates honesty on the parents' part is question no. 8, were we witness a turn for the worse:

**"to what extent do you think your teenager is helpful to you"?**

Prior to the coaching sessions, nine parents said that their teenagers were helpful to a large extent, and five stated that they are helpful to a medium extent. After the coaching sessions, when improvement was expected, five parents said their teenagers were helpful to a large extent, eight parents said that they were helpful to a medium extent and one parent said that they are helpful only to a small extent. Further discussion on qualitative validation is elaborated on p 95

### **E.7. Mechanism of change**

Looking for the winning formula that would help us understand – "what works", is probably an eternal search. There is no one, clear-cut answer which explains the reasons for the occurrence of change in individuals who undergo therapy, counseling or coaching (Yalom, 2015). In the psychological context, the questions regarding the most effective type of therapy, and the most influential factor for ensuring success, were largely examined and researched. Most researchers, one of them being Carl Rogers, the great humanistic psychologist and researcher, came up with the same conclusion. The most significant factor which contributes to the success in the areas of empowerment, self-improvement and the therapeutic process and helping others (coaching, considered to be a method for self-improvement), is the personal relationships that develop between the two sides of the equation – therapist and patient (Rogers, 2012). It is that exact place, where a person who turns for help, feels that the other is interested in them, they are being listened to, and receive empathy, containment, and respect without being judged or criticized.

There is no doubt that developing personal and parental awareness, readiness to courageously and honestly look in the mirror and identify weaknesses,

difficulties and faults, constituted the building blocks of success for the participating parents. During the coaching sessions, parents went through two parallel processes, which enabled them to accomplish significant changes:

1. The opportunity to stop the daily routine and automatic behaviors for a minute, allowed them to check what is genuinely important to them. They could discern what is fundamental in their eyes and prioritize their principals. They figured out core values for raising their children and identified their "red lines" and the issues worth insisting upon.
2. Parents were able to develop an authentic awareness mechanism, which realizes the connection between cause and effect. Parents could practically see how the different way of talking and behaving towards teenagers resulted in different reactions and behaviors on the teenagers' part. One major insight of this research was demonstrated in one of the participating mothers' story, where she told me about how she found herself yelling at her son to stop texting while she was speaking to him, while she herself was in fact texting at the same time as she was yelling at him.

Parents realized that they possess great power and enormous ability to influence, direct and create better relationships, connections and communication with their teenagers. They internalized the fact that despite adolescence being a stormy, difficult and conflict-filled age, it is not a harsh predetermination one should wait patiently for it to pass. It is utterly in their power to affect these turbulent times, while conducting connections and communication with teenagers in an aware, confident and positive manner.

To the question – ***"Assuming there is a change for the better, what enabled it?"***  
Parents replied:

- *"The coach's advice"*
- *"Understanding that there is no use in getting angry and yelling, but rather transfer responsibilities to them" (teenagers)*
- *"What enabled the change for the better, were the coaching session through which we were exposed to the fact that there are*

*things we need to change in ourselves and not in the children. We understood that there are many ways to resolve situations, but it is up to us to choose the way by the values we believe in, and always ask – what is more important?? Sometimes it's smart to make concessions over trivial things in the purpose of building an attentive, solid and confident relationship".*

- *"Think about the teenagers' side, what do they feel, what motivates them to behave the way they do"*
- *"Pay close attention to every word that comes out"*
- *"Our understanding that they (teenagers) have a different opinion which is not necessarily similar to ours"*
- *"Our new perceptions: it doesn't matter what others will say; our thinking on how to define a "red line"; being patient and tolerant; think for a moment before "freaking out"*
- *"The understanding that we are responsible for situations, it is our responsibility to make time for talking, spend quality time together, be patient and take care of the connection"*
- *"My ability to understand that everything depends on my behavior and my attitude"*
- *"Being attentive"*
- *"My understanding regarding my personal behavior at home"*
- *"A change in the teenager's behavior"*

## **Summary**

In analyzing the questionnaires and the sessions with the parents, it becomes evident that all of them experienced significant improvement in relations, connections and communication with their teenage children. In the last interview, which was conducted six months after finishing the coaching sessions, I asked all participants to relate to the changes that they experienced - ***"Regarding the things you said you want to change, improve and correct, did it work out?"***

Here are some of the answers that I received:

**Etz:** *...I think that overall there is an improvement. We set some goals (like eating dinners together) I can't say it is fully implemented, but I feel ... I don't know how to call it...discourse, atmosphere, on my part, it has improved (...). There are moments we fall back, but the general atmosphere is...if Avz is saying something out of place, I remind him – "don't you remember", it's a code"*

**Eti:** *"I feel I have more tools to deal with her, how to look at things, which I used to think were the end of the world, I have different proportions now (...) I feel I am able to understand her better. It opened up a new way to look at things (...) I'm acknowledging the fact they have their own will and their own way, that I shouldn't dictate everything...I should take a few steps back..."*

**Je:** *"I have learnt how to calm myself"*

**Avr:** *"I can feel the general atmosphere is different, less stressed, less judging (...) understanding that not everything that we as parents decide is right for them, is actually right. It's a great sacrifice to make..."*

**Li:** *"I feel I yell much less, there is more conversation around the house, more communication and touch...once I did it with one son, I noticed the other one is looking for it as well"*

## **F. Sixth Theme - Teenagers' Questionnaires Analysis and Discussion**

### **Introduction**

Despite the fact that I, as a researcher, never met the teenagers, does not mean that they did not play an active role in this research. The role they played was of course very different from that of their parents, who were the central focus of this research. They did not experience the sensations and insights that a coaching process gives, and were not part of the decision-making processes regarding changes. Yet, their presence during the meetings with the parents was strongly felt, and their voices were heard loud and clear.

The teenagers' group was a significant part of the research thanks to the two stages of questionnaires that they completed pre and post the parents' coaching sessions. The data received gave a glimpse into the teenagers' standpoints when examining their relationships with their parents and the way that they perceived

parents in general. The teenagers' questionnaires enriched the data collected from parents, not only with the intent to validate it, but rather in order to receive a global view on these complex relations, and to understand the manner in which they experienced and witnessed any changes that their parents went through.

The teenage group were not aware of the exact purpose of the research, very much like the parents themselves; hence, there were no right or wrong answers on their part. They were promised that all the answers given in the questionnaires would be kept confidential, open only to my eyes as the researcher, and would not be transferred to their parents. Therefore, their data would be relatively bias free and exclude bias based on 'Pleasing or response bias', as elaborated on p. 79. Indeed, all the parents reported that when the teenagers filled out the questionnaires, they were very secretive and private about it and did not want to share it with their parents.

### **F.1 Teenagers' Questionnaire**

Analyzing the data from the teenagers' questionnaires highlighted a few interesting issues. Firstly, that most of them recognized and felt changes in their parents' behavior, yet it is important to emphasize that some stated that they felt no change. It was not always a preferable change for them, but they were certainly aware of it. A few questions were embedded in the questionnaires, aiming at evaluating whether they witnessed any changes.

The first one was an open-ended question, asking them to describe in their own words, any noticeable change. These are their answers:

***"To what extent do you feel a change in your parents' behavior lately? Please give examples"***

- *None*
- *A lot of change because of my mom's new job*
- *I feel they care more about the things I do in my daily activities, such as soccer*
- *They are more attentive, considerate and supportive*

- *Nothing specific, more in the general atmosphere around the house*
- *I didn't feel anything*
- *the change is not prominent*
- *Less dismissive of my opinions, counting on me to know the difference between permitted and prohibited, they are not trying to invade my privacy, more patient*
- *Yes! I see a change in everything*
- *Very little change*

Other questions were aiming to identify changes in specific behaviors rather than an overall look. I chose to present these questions (out of the entire questionnaire) as a representing sample of significant components of connection and communication. These questions dealt with major hindrances that are typical to parent children relationships and many times, they reflect pressure points (anger, yelling, patience, closeness):

<b>Questionnaire Questions</b>	<b>very large extant</b>	<b>large extant</b>	<b>medium extant</b>	<b>small extant</b>	<b>Not at all</b>
29. To what extent do you feel your parents are less angry and yelling lately?	1 teenager	4 teenagers	4 teenagers	1 teenager	2 teenagers
31. To what extent do you feel you are closer to your parents lately?	1 teenager	6 teenagers	3 teenagers	2 teenagers	
32. To what extent do you feel your parents are more patient towards you?	3 teenagers	3 teenagers	1 teenager	4 teenagers	1 teenager

It was interesting to see that the teenager's answers are varied and less homogenous, yet, it is quite clear that over half of them (12 teenagers submitted questionnaires) reported that they noticed their parents were less angry and yelling, more patient and overall felt closer to their parents. This sample of data, a small section of the full questionnaire, summarizes the process parents went through, this time from the teenagers' point of view.



In my opinion, the most impressive piece of data lies in the final question presented to the teenagers, probing their point of view, in regard to the research question:

***Question: Does communicating with your parents feel more flowing and natural than before?***

Eleven (out of twelve) teenagers stated that communicating with their parents was more flowing and natural on different levels, only one teenager said that there had been no change at all.

After examining all the answers given by the teenagers, it becomes clear that most of them felt that communication with their parents had improved in the sense that it felt freer, and more easy-going. The improvement in communication with their parents is noticeable on different levels, but most of them agreed that things had changed for the better. They were aware of their parents' weekly sessions with "someone", but did not understand the process, the issues being raised and discussed, nor the misgivings and individual conflicts that their parents encountered during the sessions. They merely witnessed the results.

When taking into consideration these results alongside the things parents stated in regard to achieved changes, answering the research question appears straightforward, since both parents and teenagers pointed out the improvement in communication and connection that they could feel between them, after the parents had participated in the coaching process.

Yet, it would be irresponsible not to present some of the data gathered from teenagers, that shows inconsistencies with the results presented above.

Considering the previous statement regarding improvement in communication, one could expect a change for the better with respect to the levels of disagreement between parents and teenagers post coaching sessions. Surprisingly enough the data collected after the parents coaching sessions were completed indicated an exacerbation of the conflict levels.

An additional surprising piece of data related to the time spent with their parents, displays a degree of deterioration instead of the expected improvement.

## **F.2 Explaining Teenager Inconsistencies**

There are a few possible explanations to these contradicting results. Adolescence is defined as times of "storm and stress" (Hall, 1904; Arnett, 1999), which basically means that they tend to have frequent mood swings, sometimes for no apparent reason. It is possible that some of the teenagers answered the questionnaires on a "bad day", when everything seemed negative and annoying, especially parents, meaning the answers were not reflecting a global overview of a time period, but rather a local feeling. Another possibility is that on the same day of answering the questionnaire, teenagers and parents were involved in a quarrel that obviously influenced any information; hence, any given answer is dependent on a specific day.

A more global developmental explanation, lies in the understanding of the main psychological processes adolescents go through – separation and individualization (Blos, 1979). It is at this age that teenagers get involved in the "dance" of coming nearer and pulling away from their parents. On one hand they want to stay close to the security and warmth supplied by parents, while on the other hand they want to run away as far as possible, dismissing everything their parents say, do or believe in. Inconsistent answers might merely reflect the spiral process of separating from parents and finding their own voice.

## **Overall Discussion Summary**

This research set out with two major purposes: the first was to enable parents a genuine opportunity to delve into themselves; to explore different components of their personality; to find their core values, beliefs and principles. Once recognizing, defining and accepting all of these personality building blocks, they were able to clarify and refine their individual essence and the way it all corresponds with their real life. The second was to examine whether an individual coaching process focusing on parents, might result in improved connections and communication with adolescents. Other secondary objectives gained during the process, mainly had to do with acquiring new pragmatic parenting skills and behaviors. After conducting the research, which was composed of the comprehensive coaching sessions, and after reading and analyzing vast amounts of data, it seems possible to assess if the goals of the research as specified above, were met.

As stated before, as the result of living in an era where children take such a central position in a persons' life, when adolescents' moratorium last many years through which parents are expected to patiently "hold their breath" and wait for the tempest to calm down, contemporary parents are often pushed to the back of the stage.

There is no doubt that the first goal mentioned above, was completely achieved for two main reasons - the fact that the coaching program that I designed for the research, was completely focused and centered on parents as individuals and on their parental standing. Each session was dedicated to a different aspect, which eventually led to a holistic perception of a parent as a whole person. We started the journey of centralizing parents, in a request to look at their life cycle and notice their degree of satisfaction with each part. Later on, each session allocated time (and exercises) to different aspects of the participating parent's personality, experience and emotions, for instance – memories as teenagers, values, barriers, resources, skills and abilities. (See meeting plan, appendix no. 1 p. 219).

The other main reason for achieving the first research aim, lies in the overriding need of the parents to be seen, heard, understood and contained, merely because they are complete individuals and not only as someone's parent. This was a "win-win" situation, where the opportunity given by the research and coaching work method, met a real, live need. As elaborated on in the second theme of the result chapter (p. 136), parents had mixed emotions regarding the sudden and unexpected centrality. On one hand, they were flattered, excited and surprised due to the fact that they were used to being second. On the other hand, it was not an easy process having to face oneself and confront multiple personal issues. My decision to place the parents in a situation that was equal in importance to the place of children, is based on the simple comprehension that in order to perform good, aware and attentive parenthood, any parent should primarily be able to be attentive to and aware of him or herself. Leo Buscaglia in his book "love" (1972) explains the importance of being aware individuals. According to him, only when a person knows, accepts and loves oneself, one's uniqueness, and the need for freedom for self-exploration, only then, one is able to encourage others to follow the same path, teach and help others – especially children, discover such qualities in themselves.

As to the second goal of the research, which constitutes the research question, and in addition to all that was said and quoted by parents regarding change (see p. 179-184, the picture arising from the questionnaire, is really worth a thousand words (see table on p. 184). The results derive from the final interview and second questionnaire that were held months after concluding their participation in the research, indicate that all participating parents have clearly witnessed a significant improvement in connection and communication with their teenagers after having gone through a comprehensive coaching process.

In conclusion, I believe that the research question was fully answered through the research data. After witnessing how all the participating parents and teenagers achieved different degrees of enriched relations, it appears safe to say that individual parental coaching is a viable method for improving the parent- teenagers' equation.

## **Chapter 5 – Reflection, Limitation and a Glimpse into the Future**

### **A. Researcher Ethical Reflection and Positioning**

As stated before, ethical complexities are inherent to the world of research, where each unique research poses issues specific to that study. General and common ethical issues that I have addressed from the beginning included information, transparency, confidentiality, risks, gain and loss, anonymity, willingness to participate and the right to end participation, as elaborated on the Ethics part p. 99.

In his book *"Words of Meaning"*, Shkedi (2003) refers to the researcher as a research tool - The researcher position of any qualitative research is very significant since he/she is an essential part of the reality investigation. The qualitative researcher is subjectively present inside the researched field and process, since he/she is the exclusive interpreter of the data (Shlasky & Alpert, 2007). Another significant factor is the connection between the qualitative researcher to the researched field and the participants. In many cases, this acquaintance of the researched field can be an advantage, since it enables the researcher a better understanding of how things work in reality (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

At this point, it is important to explain that I have worked as a certified group facilitator for over eleven years; over six of them have been dedicated to working with parents, mostly parents of teenagers. In addition, I am a trained coach and for over twelve years, I have coached a variety of clients, including many parents and teenagers. I am also a lecturer at an academic college of education, teaching and training bachelor degree students towards their degree in education plus students who are training to work with adolescents and youth at-risk.

Furthermore, I am also a mother of a teenager myself, so I am very familiar with the overall atmosphere of parenting in the context of Israeli society. I know the terminology both parents and teenagers use, and I can identify with the difficulties with which parents encounter raising teenagers these days. I believe

this familiarity of the field and the personal experience of motherhood, made it safe for parents to open up to me, to let me into their homes and souls, and to speak freely about themselves. My position was not one of a culturally distant or privileged researcher; their perception of me was that of an expert in the field of coaching, knowledgeable in the area of parenthood, and a mother, just like them, one that deals with the same doubts, frustrations and dilemmas.

Despite the advantages explained above, during the course of the coaching sessions I had with the participant parents, many questions and deliberations have occupied my thoughts. As a woman and a mother, I brought my personal and parental ethical core into the research, which I am sure, had an impact on my experience and interpretations of what transpired in the course of the study. I know my choice of the research topic originated in my worlds of content and interest, and it is impossible to fully separate and differentiate between me as a researcher and me as a person. Nevertheless, throughout the sessions and while analyzing the data, I was very much aware of the danger of over-identifying, of counter-transference or of being judgmental. It was a constant process in which I needed to examine myself on issues such as - do I agree/disagree as a mother? Would I act the same way if I were in similar situations and circumstances? What do I think of and how do I feel about personal or parental choices made by the participants?

A different set of misgivings I detected during the research, were partly due to the “double role” position: have I fulfilled my role as a coach in the best possible manner? Were the chosen questions and methods in favor of the participants or in favor of the research? Have I taken advantage of the participants? Would I act differently had I not been the researcher as well? Did they receive a quality coaching process? I believe I have dedicated much thought to these questions and deliberations, I was very much aware of them, and did everything with in my power and within the research boundaries trying to address those issues.

## B. Research Contribution

The contribution of this research is visible in overlapping circles. On the personal level, it provides real-life parents in Israeli society with a chance for a brave and honest self-encounter, in a safe and contained environment. On a broader social level, it provides a platform where parents can share their unique and personal narrative; they receive a chance to voice their story, their feelings, the issues that they are concerned with, their fears, hopes and dreams. We as researchers, receive an opportunity to be exposed to authentic data deeply rooted in the Israeli parental reality.

This research contributes to the literature by introducing a new perspective – **the parent as a separate individual**. I feel that this will enable us to receive some insights regarding the parental side of the equation, and lead to the development of additional parental help programs, which will meet parents' needs as well as the teenagers' needs.

Most parental aid programs in Israel focus on the child's/adolescent's needs and refers to parents as an instrument towards the improvement of their child's life. On a practical level, this research offers a new method of parental coaching (proven effective, according to the results of this research) which will enable parents to improve relationships and communication by undergoing the coaching process that helps them detail their values, beliefs and priorities. The method can be easily adapted to all cultures and populations, since its basic components are universal – values, priorities and boundaries.

Future plans include publication in relevant journals in the fields of parenthood, parental guidance, coaching and adolescence as well as a book that will be accessible to both non-professionals, as well as experts in the relevant practical and academic fields. Workshops presenting the results are to be given in relevant forums, especially to professionals in the fields of parental guidance, counseling and coaching. As to further research, see p. 201

In my private clinic, I have been successfully working with parents, according to the program presented here. In the field of group facilitating, where I work with parents, I intend to use this method, with the appropriate adjustments.

### **C. Research Limitation**

Like any research, it is impossible to design and conduct the "perfect research". Limitations, constraints and restrictions are embedded in the research conduct and data analysis. Apart from common limitations in qualitative research (as discussed in the methodology chapter), this research has some unique limitations.

- The research question was targeted at a very specific type of family: heterosexual, married couples who live and raise one or more teenagers together. Israeli society consists of many different and diverse family types, which were excluded from this study. Other family and parent types may hold different core values, deal with different kinds of dilemmas when raising teenagers, and consequently might produce different results.
- Israeli society accommodates many cultural segments e.g. - religious people (of all religions), immigrants ("newcomers" as referred to in Israel) and different nationalities (Arab, Bedouin, Druse, Armenian). This research focused only on one segment – Jewish, secular, middle class families (as described on p. 108).
- Researcher "double role" (as specified above)
- Research population size – this research was based on "Purposeful sampling" (Patton, 1990) as the most efficient method regarding time and resources for selecting "information-rich cases". Despite the relatively small sample, an abundance of data was collected.



- Generalization potential - one of the most prevalent critiques regarding qualitative research, even among its supporters, deals with the ability to generalize with regard to other people, environments and cultures (Shkedi, 2003). The generalization ability of qualitative research does not lean on rigorous principals or statistical rules, but on the ability to study fewer participants or cases in greater depth and to learn from each one as much as possible. The qualitative study should present a full and rich picture and allow a "thick description" (Geertz, 1994) of the researched reality and interpretation, so when trying to generalize, there is plenty of information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since this research is deeply rooted in Israeli culture and society, the question of introducing this to parents in other societies, arises. Despite all the limitations mentioned above, I believe that parents from different countries and nationalities and of varying family structures could benefit from the suggested process of individual parental coaching regardless of their cultural backgrounds. I think many parents of adolescents face similar issues on the personal level, and they will appreciate the opportunity to meet themselves as individuals apart from their parental role.

#### **D. Further Research**

Throughout the entire research process, I could easily imagine potential ways for continuing and expanding this research in the field of parental coaching and envision the possible effect on connection and communication with teenagers.

There are two major tracks for continuation:

- While recruiting potential participants, I received many requests to join the research, from various family types that were very different from the parameters, which were defined as criteria to join this research. In my opinion, since the result of this research shows that individual parental coaching has a clear effect on positive changes and improvement in connection and communication; it is worthwhile to continue researching other populations with the suitable adaptations. Extending the research and work method to two levels of population diversity:
  1. Different and diverse types of families, for example - single parent families, or families headed by same-sex couples.
  2. Various segments of the Israeli society as elaborated above, such as parents from all religions, nationalities, social status.
- A longitudinal study – I see great significance in returning to the initial participants of this research after a substantial period of time. Indeed, I conducted the final interview with the parents after a five-month break, but I believe an additional follow-up after a year or more, will produce important information as to the sustainability of the newly acquired personal insights and parental skills, which led to better connection and communication with the teenagers. Moreover, such an examination would allow me to recognize the optimal structure of the coaching process, one that would supply parents with an answer regarding their need for maintaining the changes. The goal would be for the changes to become an intrinsic part of the individual's awareness, eventually leading to a new and improved parenting style.

### **Summary: A Personal Word**

In spite of the complexity of being a coach as well as a researcher, within the framework of the coaching process, I managed to establish a deep, respectful and appreciative bond with each one of the parents as individuals and as couples. This relationship was built on the genuine interest I had in each one as a whole person, each with their individual thoughts, feelings, fears, angers, disappointments and dreams. I respected and legitimized every statement, thought or feeling, which came up during the sessions, in a way that supported each one of the participants in feeling seen, contained and appreciated.

Methodologically, this kind of close rapport can burden and reduce the ability to "objectively" ascertain the factors that enabled a successful work process, one that resulted in the participating parents' ability to experience the changes that they wished to achieve.

On a professional level, as a coach, I feel that the process was successful, since **all** the participants completed the coaching process with a sense of having achieved the goals they had set for themselves, reaching various levels of significant change. To the best of my knowledge and belief, in the world of "helping others" professions, the caregiver, whether this is a psychologist, advisor, instructor or coach, brings his/her entire personality into the process. This includes – thinking abilities, comprehension and analytical abilities, professional knowledge, core values, emotional capacities and their essence as an individual. In looking at the whole picture, it is almost impossible to actually separate between the work process and its results, from the coach's personality and his or her professional connection with the coachee.

Recursively, both sides of this equation, are intertwined with each other.

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## Footnotes

### Chapter 1

1. The quarterly review of comparative education (Paris, UNESCO: International Bureau of Education), vol. XXIII, no. 3/4, 1993, pp. 825-837. ©UNESCO: International Bureau of Education, 2000 (p.13)
2. <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/children-should-be-seen-and-not-heard.html/> (p.14)
3. <http://www.rolidera.co.il/English> (p.20)
4. <http://www.azrielifoundation.org/programs/education/> (p.20)
5. <http://yedidim-israel.org/> (p.20)
6. <http://www.wtb.org.il/english/> (p.20)

### Chapter 2

7. <https://www.coachfederation.org/need/landing.cfm?ItemNumber=978> (p.45)

### Chapter 3

8. <https://coachingsupervisionacademy.com/coaching-supervision-and-parallel-process/> (p.83)
9. <http://harfordtherapy.blogspot.co.uk/2010/02/parallel-process-theoretical-review-and.html> (p.83)
10. <http://ct.counseling.org/2013/09/attending-to-countertransference/> (p.85)
11. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/sacramento-street-psychiatry/201003/countertransference-overview> (p.85)



13. <https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/resources-for-researchers> (pg.94)
15. <https://www.emccouncil.org/quality/ethics/> (p.99)
16. <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/services-and-resources/impact-evidence-evaluation-child-protection/conducting-safe-and-ethical-research/> (p.102)
17. [https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\\_fs/1.165641!/file/SREGP-Children-Young-People.pdf](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.165641!/file/SREGP-Children-Young-People.pdf) (p. 105)

#### Chapter 4

18. <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/value> (p. 117)
19. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/value> (p. 117)
20. "Ten commandments" is an acceptable phrase, a metaphor in Hebrew Referring to "the most important thing". (p. 129)
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## Appendix 1 – Meetings Plan

Ten coaching meetings of 60 minutes to which both parents attend.

### Mutual "get to know" Meeting:

This meeting is set in order to examine the suitability and motivation of both parents and the researcher to enter a joint coaching process.

During this meeting:

- The researcher will tell the parents about herself (job, education etc.).
- There will be a short explanation about their participation in the study – a little information about the study (in order not to influence the parents in any way, there will be no information regarding any specific aim of the study but a vague background i.e. a study about parent-teenager communication).
- There will be a description of the participation demands – an explanation about the questionnaires, the "depth interview" and the requirement for both parents to attend.
- The parents will sign the coaching agreement.
- There will be a setting determination.
- The parents will receive a notebook in which they will reflect on the meetings, answer questions and do the assignments they that will receive during meetings.

### **First Meeting – Deep recognition:**

**Opening exercise - the "cycle of life" exercise.**

#### **Questions:**

- What are the different components of my life?
- To what extent does my cycle of life indicate my satisfaction?
- What else am I willing to fulfill?
- What can assist\prevent me from perusing and fulfilling my dreams?
- Who was I before parenting?
- Why did I choose parenting?
- Was my choice of parenting a conscious choice?
- How have I changed since I became a parent?

## **Second Meeting – Parents as teenagers:**

**Opening exercise – a good story and a bad story from adolescence.**

### **Questions:**

- What are the strongest sensations that I remember from adolescence?
- What was important for me then?
- What fears do I recall from then?
- What did I aspire to be?
- What were my dreams?
- Who were my role models?
- What was the nature of my relations with my parents, friends and teachers?
- To what extent do I think my teenager's adolescence resembles mine?
- What are the differences and similarities between my teenager's and my adolescence?
- To what extent am I connected to my teenager's sensations as a teenager?
- Do I tell my teenager about my adolescence?
- Which parts of my adolescence do I share with my teenager?

### **Third Meeting – My parenting so far**

**Opening exercise – figures on a tree exercise – where do you place your self-satisfaction of your parenting.**

#### **Questions:**

- How did I imagine/dream my parenting?
- Am I similar to my parents? Am I different?
- Which parts of my parents parenting did I like? Which not?
- Did I promise myself to be a different parent?
- Did I manage to keep this promise?
- Am I the parent I dreamed to be?
- Which parts of my parenting do I like? Which not?
- What are the main difficulties in my parenting?
- What would I change?
- What anecdotes of my parenting do I review as successes?
- What are my weak points/spots?
- What/who can assist me to improve my parenting as I wish?

**Home assignment** - note three symbols that represent my parenting and three that do not.

#### **Fourth Meeting – Value mapping**

**Opening exercise – value cards – each parent picks 10 main values that define her/him as a person.**

##### **Questions:**

- What are my main values as a person?
- Where and how in my daily life are my values expressed?
- In which situations do I feel the gap between my values and my actions?
- According to which values do I want to raise my children?
- Are my values as a parent similar to my values as a person?
- Is there a difference between my actions and the actions I expect of my children?

**Home assignment** – the two parents will phrase their mutual "10 commandments" of parenting.



### **Fifth Meeting – Limits in parenting**

#### **Opening exercise – the "traffic light" exercise.**

Upon the exploration of each parent's personal values, and the couples "10 commandments" we will identify each parent's "red lines", according to which we will define the limits of their parenting.

#### **Questions:**

- Regarding what subject will I not compromise in front of my teenagers? Why?
- What happens when my teenagers and I disagree?
- How is the dialogue/negotiation managed?
- Who decides?
- Am I attentive to my teenagers during a disagreement?
- To what extent would I fight with my teenagers?
- What is my view on punishing?
- How do I punish?
- In my opinion, how does my teenagers experience the punishment?
- Is my punishing effective?
- Does it respect my teenager and our connection?

A possible discussion on sanctions.

### Sixth Meeting – Dream and reality

Every parent has dreams and aspirations about her/his parenting. Usually, there is a gap between these dreams and the reality of parenting. In this session, we will discuss the gap and its inevitability.

#### **Opening exercise**

- Barriers list – each person chooses the barriers disturbing the most.
- Leprecon cards (the "wild things").
- Word cards – each parent chooses 5 cards describing the person he thought he/she would be and 5 cards describing the person he/she is.

#### Questions:

- What difficulties interrupt me from becoming a successful person?
- What are the situations that pose difficulties at work, in a relationship or with friends?
- Which barriers interrupt me from becoming the person and parent I wished to be?
- Which "buttons" do I identify in me as a person? As a parent?
- What are the situations in which I do not like myself as a person and parent?
- Do I have "parenting principles" (paradigms) according to which I educate my children? Do they serve my children and me?

### **Seventh Meeting – My set of resources**

Each individual has a set of resources, skills and abilities that enable her/him to manage life optimally.

#### **Opening exercise – power cards (the wild things).**

##### **Questions:**

- What are my best qualities?
- What are my unique powers?
- What am I best at?
- Which skills, abilities and talents do I have?
- What are my strengths as a person and a parent?

#### **Home assignment – "guests in my life"**

Each parent needs to ask three friends:

- ✓ What do you think I am best at?
- ✓ What do you like about my appearance?
- ✓ To your opinion, what was my happiest time?
- ✓ How would you describe my strengths in 3 words?
- ✓ Was I ever a source of support and assistance to you?
- ✓ What do you most respect about me?
- ✓ If you had to describe as a car, which car would you pick?
- ✓ If you had to describe as an animal, which animal would you pick?

## Eighth Meeting – "tools" for a different parenting approach

### **Opening exercise**

Discussion on the answers to the "guests in my life" questionnaire.

Assembling a parenting "toolbox" which will assist in resolving conflict and difficulty in relations with teenagers.

- Efra"t model – developing an ability for subjective viewing.
- Listening techniques
- Encouraging
- **ST – SC** model – **S**mile (to any beginning), **T**ouch (in this age, mostly physical touch), **S**trengthen (the good things verbally and ask questions) and **C**ompliment (deliver a positive message to the child, even on his very existence).

### Questions:

- Which qualities make a person successful in my view?
- Which qualities make a parent successful in my view?
- Of the qualities I mentioned, how many do I have?

### **Home assignment – "future me"**

- Send yourself a letter from the age of 60 - which thoughts, highlights and advice would you send yourself from the future?

Or

- Assume you died in a good old age. Write the eulogy you would want people to say about you.

### **Ninth Meeting – Dream and reality**

Upon viewing my personality as a person and a parent, identifying my strengths and weaknesses and realizing my "dream parenting", how would I like to see my relations with my teenager, both in the foreseeable and far future?

**Opening exercise – who is the most successful parent I have met so far (family, friends or a movie character) and what made him\her successful.**

#### **Open discussion**

##### Pivot Questions:

Answer with one word:

- What is my most favorite word?
- What is my least favorite word?
- What turns me on?
- What disguises me?
- What sound\noise do I like?
- What sound\noise do I hate?
- Which profession, except my own, would I want to try?
- Which profession, except my own, would I not want to try?
- If heaven exists, what would I want god to tell me upon its gates?
- In my opinion, what is the most important thing in the world?
- What are my five greatest achievements in life?
- If I could choose – what would I never do anymore?
- How would I pass my time, if I did not need to work for a living?
- What makes me feel wonderful and energized?
- If I just (had\was) \_\_\_\_\_ then I would (do\get\feel) \_\_\_\_\_.
- After death, what do I want my children to say about me?

## **Tenth Meeting – Summary and farewell**

Summary of the coaching process

- What have I accomplished through it as a person and as a parent?
- Have I felt a change in my behavior towards my children?
- What substantial lessons have I learned?
- Did I learn anything new about myself?

**Opening exercise - parenting quotations – each parent chooses the one that fits her/him the most.**

Questions:

Answer with one word:

- Would I change something the "circle of life" exercise I did at the first meeting?
- Have I changed in the past months? In what way?
- if I haven't changed, what did I not manage to change? Why?
- What have I found out about myself during the coaching process?
- Is there anything else I want to work on regarding me as a person and a parent?
- What could assist me in accomplishing the change I would like to see in my life or in me?

To summarize – one word that summarizes the coaching process for me

## Appendix 2 – Parents' Questionnaires

### Stage 1 – Pré - coaching sessions

This questionnaire consists of 30 questions regarding your relations with your teenager. If a question is marked yellow, you are asked to write freely. Else, you are asked to answer according to the following scale:

- 5 = to a very large extent
- 4 = to a large extent
- 3 = to a small extent
- 2 = to a very small extent
- 1 = not at all

#### Questions:

1. To what extent do you feel your communication with your teenager is natural and free?
2. To what extent do you feel you can talk with your teenager about everything?  
**What do you and your teenager do not talk about?**
3. To what extent do you think your teenager shares their private issues with you?  
**Give an example:**
4. To what extent does your teenager trust you?
5. To what extent does your teenager consult you?
6. To what extent do you and your teenager spend time together or do “common activities”?
7. To what extent do you and your teenager argue or disagree?
8. To what extent do you think your teenager is helpful to you?
9. To what extent do you share your thoughts and feelings with your teenager?
- 10. How much time a day (on average) do you spend talking and hanging out with your teenager?**
11. To what extent do you consider your teenager’s thoughts and opinions?
12. To what extent do you and your teenager share common interests and hobbies?
13. To what extent is your communication with your teenager based on instructions and comments?
14. To what extent do you consider your teenager’s advice when making a decision?
15. To what extent do you trust your teenager?  
**Give an example of a time you did not trust you teenager**
16. To what extent do you except your teenager’s decisions when they are against your opinion?
17. To what extent do you consider yourself considerate and attentive to your teenager’s needs, wishes and distresses?
18. To what extent are you tolerant to your teenager’s “worlds of content”? (music, fashion, hobbies and interests)
19. To what extent do you take part in your teenager’s life experiences?
20. To what extent do you limit your teenager from doing things you disapprove?

21. To what extent do you punish your teenager?  
**What kind of punishments do you use?**
22. To what extent do you feel you have succeeded to establish happy and warm parenthood for your teenagers
23. To what extent are you proud of the person your teenager is becoming?
24. To what extent do you praise and compliment your teenager?
25. To what extent do you critic your teenager and find yourself disappointed of his/ her behaviors?
26. To what extent do you feel your connection with your teenager is similar to the one you had with your parents as a teenager?
27. To what extent do you feel you are the parent you wanted to be before your child was born?
- 28. What would you change or improve in your parenting?**
29. To what extent do you want to change your teenager?  
**What would you change?**
30. To what extent do you respect your teenager's will to be alone, to go out with friends or not to arrive to family events?

## Stage 2 – Post coaching sessions

This questionnaire consists of 45 questions regarding your relations with your teenager. If a question is marked yellow, you are asked to write freely. Else, you are asked to answer according to the following scale:

- 5 = to a very large extent
- 4 = to a large extent
- 3 = to a small extent
- 2 = to a very small extent
- 1 = not at all

### Questions

1. To what extent do you feel that your communication with your teenager is natural and free?
2. To what extent do you feel you can talk with your teenager about everything?  
**What do you and your teenager do not talk about?**
3. To what extent do you think your teenager shares their private issues with you?  
**Give an example**
4. To what extent does your teenager trust you?
5. To what extent does your teenager consult you?
6. To what extent do you and your teenager spent time together or do "common activities"?
7. To what extent do you and your teenager argue or disagree?
8. To what extent do you think your teenager is helpful to you?
9. To what extent do you share your thoughts and feelings with your teenager?



10. How much time a day (on average) do you spend talking and hanging out with your teenager?
11. Are you satisfied with the amount of time dedicated to your teenager?
12. Do you feel he/she needs more time with you?
13. To what extent do you consider your teenager's thoughts and opinions?
14. To what extent do you and your teenager share common interests and hobbies?
15. To what extent is your communication with your teenager based on instructions and comments?
16. To what extent do you consider your teenager's advice when coming to a decision?
17. To what extent do you trust your teenager?  
Give an example of a times you did not trust you teenager
18. To what extent do you except your teenager's decisions if they are against your opinion?  
What are the issues you will not compromise?  
Has there been any change it the conflict issues lately?
19. To what extent do you consider yourself considerate and attentive to your teenager's needs, wishes and distresses?
20. To what extent are you tolerant to your teenager's "worlds of content"? (music, fashion, hobbies and interests)
21. To what extent do you take part in your teenager's life experiences?
22. To what extent do you limit your teenager from doing things you disapprove?
23. To what extent do you punish your teenager?
24. What kind of punishments do you use?
25. To what extant do you feel you have succeeded to establish happy and warm parenthood for your teenagers
26. To what extent are you proud of the person your teenager is becoming?
27. To what extent do you praise and compliment your teenager?
28. To what extent do you critic your teenager and find yourself disappointed of their behaviors?
29. To what extent do you feel your connection with your teenager is similar to the one you had with your parents as a teenager?
30. To what extent do you feel you are the parent you wanted to be before your child was born?
31. What would you change or improve in your parenting?
32. To what extent do you want to change your teenager?  
What would you change?
33. To what extent do you respect your teenager's will to be alone, to go out with friends or not to arrive to family events?
34. To what extent (if any) do you feel your relationships with your teenagers have changed for the better lately?  
If so, what are the main issues that have changed?
35. To what extent do you feel responsible to the change?
36. Was there any improvement in communication with your teenagers?
37. Was there any change for the worse regarding to relationships with your teenager?
38. Do you feel that you are lees angry, disappointed and yelling regarding various behaviors of your teenagers?

39. To what extent do you pay attention to the things you say to them and the language you choose in communicating with your teenager?
40. To what extent do you feel that you are a role model to your teenagers?
41. To what extent do you feel your teenager tries to get close to you and share their inner lives with you?
42. Are there any other things you would like to change in communicating with your teenagers? What are they?
43. To what extent do you feel the general atmosphere in the house is more relaxed?
44. Assuming there is a change for the better, what enabled it?
45. To what extent do you feel that you are responsible to the quality of communication with your teenagers?

## Appendix 3 – Teenagers' Questionnaires

### Stage one – Pre parents' coaching sessions

This questionnaire consists of 30 questions regarding your relations with your parents. Answer according to the following scale:

- 5 = to a very large extent
- 4 = to a large extent
- 3 = to a small extent
- 2 = to a very small extent
- 1 = not at all

#### Questions:

1. To what extent do you feel close to your parents?
2. To what extent are your parents important to you?
3. To what extent do you love your parents?
4. How would you rank your parents' place in your life?
5. To what extent do you feel your parents are interested in your life?
6. To what extent do you feel comfortable to share your experiences with your parents?
7. To what extent do you consult your parents about problems or dilemmas?
8. To what extent do you share private things with your parents?
9. To what extent do you feel the help and advice your parents give you, suits you?
10. To what extent do you feel your parents trust you?
11. To what extent do you feel your parents empower you?
12. To what extent do you feel your parents are proud of you?
13. To what extent do you feel your parents are considerate regarding your decisions and opinions?
14. To what extent do you feel your parents respect your decisions, even if they are against their opinion?
15. To what extent are you and your parents in a controversy or in a disagreement?
16. To what extent do you and your parents share common interests?
17. To what extent do you and your parents do things together and “hang-out”?
18. To what extent do you and your parents get angry and fight with each other?
19. To what extent do you and your parents help one another?
20. To what extent do your parents punish you?
21. To what extent do you feel your parents dismiss or disregard you?
22. To what extent do your parents force you to do things against your will?
23. To what extent do you feel your parents respect your need for privacy and private time?
24. To what extent do you appreciate your parents?
25. To what extent can you “read” your parents feelings and thoughts without having them to tell you?
26. To what extent do your parents share things of their life with you?
27. To what extent are you proud of your parents’ achievements and behaviors?

28. To what extent are you embarrassed of your parents in front of others?
29. To what extent are your parents a role model for you?
30. To what extent do you trust your parents?

## **Stage two – Post parents' coaching sessions**

This questionnaire consists of 40 questions regarding your relations with your parents. Answer according to the following scale:

- 5 = to a very large extent
- 4 = to a large extent
- 3 = to a small extent
- 2 = to a very small extent
- 1 = not at all

### Questions:

1. To what extent do you feel close to your parents?
2. To what extent are your parents important to you?
3. To what extent do you love your parents?
4. How would you rank your parents' place in your life?
5. To what extent do you hide information from your parents?
6. To what extent do you feel your parents are interested in your life?
7. Does communicating with your parents feel more flowing and natural than before?
8. To what extent do you feel comfortable to share your experiences with your parents?
9. Which issues don't you share with your parents?
10. To what extent do you consult your parents about problems or dilemmas?
11. To what extent do you share private things with your parents?
12. To what extent do you feel the help and advice your parents give you, suits you?
13. To what extent do you feel your parents trust you?
14. To what extent do you feel your parents empower you?
15. To what extent do you feel your parents are proud of you?
16. To what extent do you feel your parents are considerate regarding your decisions and opinions?
17. To what extent do you feel your parents respect your decisions, even if they are against their opinion?
18. To what extent are you and your parents in a controversy or in a disagreement?
19. To what extent do you and your parents share common interests?
20. To what extent do you and your parents do things together and "hang-out"?
21. To what extent are you involved at home – help, initiate, care and interested?
22. To what extent do you and your parents get angry and fight with each other?
23. To what extent do you and your parents help one another?
24. To what extent do your parents punish you?
25. To what extent are you more patient towards your parents lately?
26. To what extent do you feel your parents dismiss or disregard you?

27. To what extent do your parents force you to do things against your will?
28. To what extent do you feel you want to share things with them?
29. To what extent do you feel your parents are less angry and yelling lately?
30. To what extent do you feel your parents respect your need for privacy and private time?
31. To what extent do you feel you are closer to your parents lately?
32. To what extent do you feel your parents are more patient towards you?
33. To what extent do you appreciate your parents?
34. To what extent can you "read" your parents feelings and thoughts without having them to tell you?
35. To what extent do your parents share things of their life with you?
36. To what extent do you feel a change in your parents' behavior lately? Please give examples
37. To what extent are you proud of your parents' achievements and behaviors?
38. To what extent are you embarrassed of your parents in front of others?
39. To what extent are your parents a role model for you?
40. To what extent do you trust your parents?